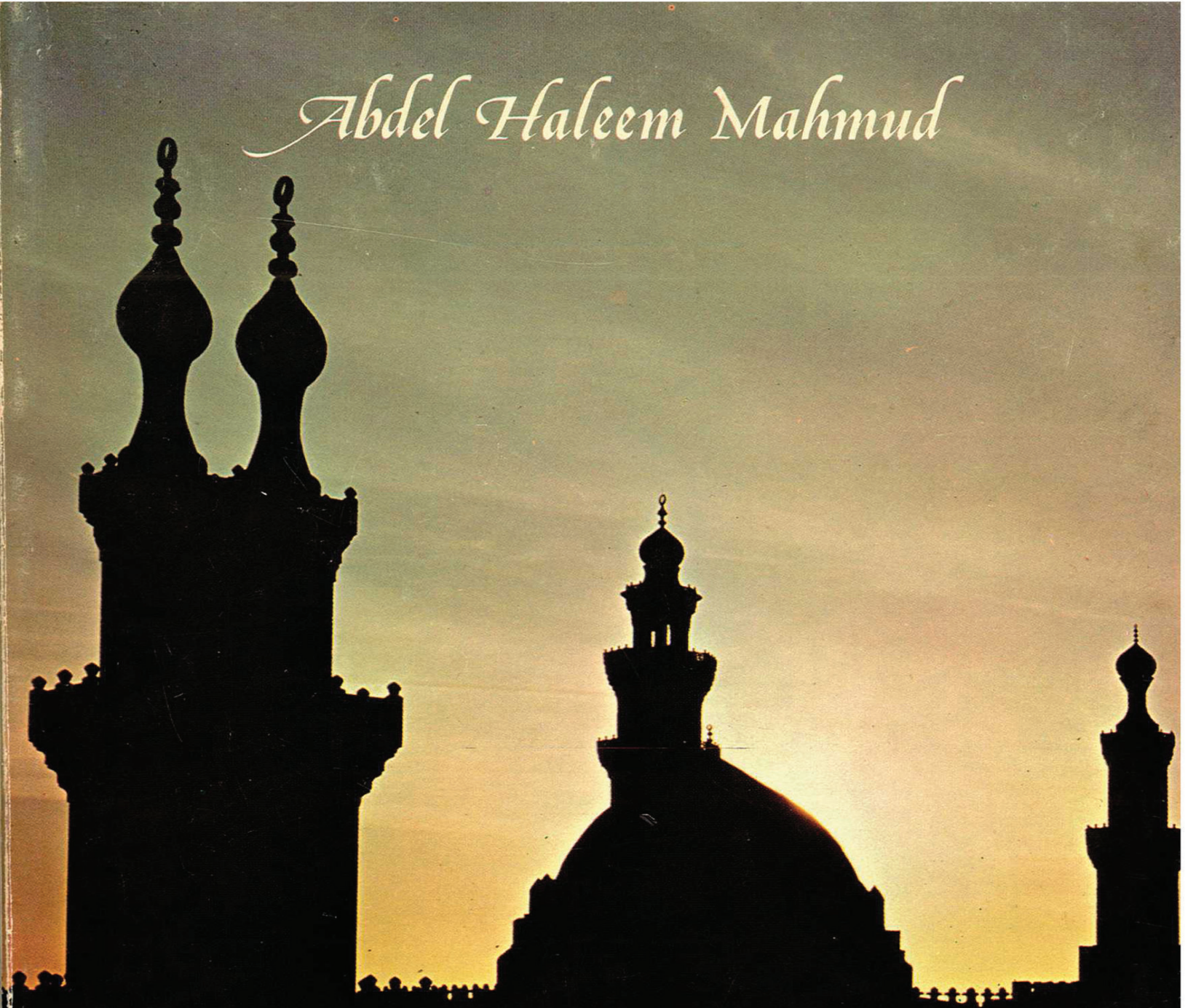
Abdel Haleem Mahmud



The Creed of Islam

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by

Abdel Haleem Mahmud

Foreword by Martin Lings
(Abu Bakr Siraj Ed Din)

Translated by
Dr. Mahmud Abdel Haleem

WORLD OF ISLAM FESTIVAL TRUST

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTES:

1 In the opinion of the translator, there is not as yet any satisfactory translation of the Qur'ān in English.

2 The customary invocations after the name of God, the Prophet(s) and others now dead are omitted from this English translation. Muslims may insert such an invocation in their reading if it is so wished.

The Author

Dr. Abdel Haleem Mahmud was born in Egypt (Eastern Delta Province) in 1910. After completing his education at Al-Azhar University and the Sorbonne (Paris) in religious studies, philosophy, psychology and sociology, he took his doctorate in Islamic Sufism (First class honours: Sorbonne) in 1940, and returned to Egypt as lecturer in psychology at the Faculty of Usūl al-Dīn (theology) at Al-Azhar University.

In 1951 he became Professor of Philosophy; in 1964 he was appointed Dean of the Faculty and a member of the Academy of Islamic Research; in 1970 he was appointed Deputy to the Shaikh Al-Azhar and in 1971 Minister of Awqaf (Religious Endowments) and Al-Azhar Affairs. He was appointed Grand Shaikh Al-Azhar in 1973, which position he continues to hold today. Dr. Abdel Haleem Mahmud has travelled widely throughout the Islamic world and outside it, both as a visiting academic and in his capacity as Grand Shaikh Al-Azhar.

In 1976, he visited England to attend the inauguration of the World of Islam Festival. He was presented to H.M. Queen Elizabeth II, and, as well as visiting the Muslim communities of the U.K., was received by His Grace the Archbishop of Canterbury and other dignitaries of the churches. He opened the exhibition of 'The Qur'ān' in the British Library (British Museum). His published writing is prolific, ranging from philosophy and ethics to religious subjects, starting with his doctoral thesis in French on al-Hārith al-Muhāsibī and proceeding with many works in Arabic, such as 'Islam and Reason', 'Islamic Mysticism' and 'Islamic Philosophical Thought'.

FOREWORD

Each century, for the men and women who lived in it, was always in the past an object of blame. The twentieth century is the unique exception to this rule. It has been characterized, especially in the West, by an increasing tendency to think that every domain of life should be made to 'conform' to modern times, or in other words 'brought up to date'. Nothing is allowed to escape, not even religion, and many of the so-called religious authorities are much preoccupied with the idea of imbuing their religion with what they call 'the spirit of the twentieth century'.

It could, however, be argued that the idea of conformity may be understood in more than one way. Medicine for example, in order to conform to the age, must be capable of supplying antidotes to all that is most prevalent in the way of illness. Analogously, it would not be unreasonable to maintain that in order to conform to an age characterized by drastic change and turbulent unrest, religion should be more than ever ready to display, and even to advertise, the rocklike stability without which, as the vehicle of External Truth, it can never in any case be true to itself. There is no doubt that the vast majority of believing souls feel a deep need for something in their lives which will always remain the same, and they expect their religion to be the unfailing constant which fulfils this need.

Providence itself would seem to corroborate this point of view. Since Islām is the last religion to be revealed to man, we have a right to assume that it has a providential conformity with the needs of the final phase of this temporal cycle, that is, with the period in which we live when, as the Qur'ān tells us, 'the Hour is at hand';

and if in the light of this sure instance of conformity we seek to define what conformity means, spiritually speaking, we find that it does not mean being an accomplice, as some would like to think. Islām in no sense panders to the short-comings of our time. It is on the contrary an implacable antidote to these failings; and it has been endowed in particular with what might be called a 'built-in safeguard' against change. It is impossible for any group of Muslims to succeed in adapting the religion to suit their own individual preferences. Immutability is one of its integral and basic aspects. The creed and the liturgy of Islām are inviolably proof against human interference.

This does not mean, however, that misleading books cannot be written about Islam. It is therefore reassuring to find in the author's preface:

> 'The reader will observe that we have attempted to let the Qur'ān and the sayings of the Prophet (Hadith) speak for themselves - as they are the main sources of Islamic teachings - and that we have not added anything which has no support in these.'

The author is moreover an expert. As Shaikh al-Azhar he is the Rector of that University (the oldest in the world) to which, more than to any other, Muslims throughout the centuries have sent their sons from all parts of the Islamic world to be trained as religious authorities. It is therefore no small guarantee for the reliability of this book that it should come from the pen of one who is at the head of this great institution. Nor will anyone deny that amongst those who have held this high office within living memory, Shaikh 'Abdel Haleem Mahmūd is one of the most outstanding figures; and the list of his publications bears witness that it is to the profoundest aspects of religion that he himself is personally drawn.

MARTIN LINGS
(Abu Bakr Siraj Ed Din)
London, 1977.

PREFACE

In the Name of God, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate.

Praise belongs to God and thanks are due to Him for His Bounty and Grace – out of which He gave us Islām, the perennial religion of submission to His Will – and for guiding us towards it. He brought religion to its culmination with Islām and set the seal on the line of Prophets with the Messenger of Islām, whose message was rendered all-embracing, universal, lasting to the Day of Judgement.

> *This day have I consummated your religion for you and completed My favour upon you, and chosen Islām to be your religion.* (*Qur'ān, V, 3*)

This is a study of Islām, dealing with the principles of the Islamic creed and touching on the effect they have on the individual who practises them. The essays have been compiled to celebrate the occasion of the World of Islām Festival which was held in London from April to June 1976. It is hoped that, along with other works, it will give readers the opportunity to become acquainted with the essence of Islām and its message. This book aims at the general reader and gives simple images of the tenets of the Islamic creed without becoming too technical or going into great detail. The reader will observe that we have attempted to let the Qur'ān and Sayings of the Prophet (Hadith) speak for themselves – as they are the main sources of Islamic teachings - and that we have not added anything which has no support in these.

I trust that God will render these studies beneficial and that they, and the Festival now passed, will help to bring people nearer to an understanding of Islām and each other. In the Qur'ān, God

speaks to mankind thus:

> *O mankind, We have created you male and female and made you into nations and tribes, that you may come to know one another: the noblest among you in the sight of God is he who is most dutiful to Him. God is All-Knowing, All-Aware.*

ᶜAbdel-Haleem Mahmūd,
Shaykh al-Azhar
(rector of al-Azhar University)
Cairo, 3:12:1976

I. ISLAM: THE WORD AND ITS MEANING

In order to arrive at some understanding of the religion of Islām we should, in the first place, turn to the word itself as a guide, both in its dictionary definition and religious connotations. What is meant by 'a Muslim'?

In defining the lexical meaning, Ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328/939) said, 'A Muslim is a person who has dedicated his worship exclusively to God, for just as we say in Arabic that something is *'salima'* to a person, meaning that it *became solely his own*, so in the same way *'Islām'* means making one's religion and faith God's alone.'[1]

Ibn al-Anbārī's lexical definition agrees with that given of Islām by the Prophet (may God bless him and grant him peace).[2] He was once asked, 'What is Islām?' and he replied, 'It consists in giving your heart solely to God and in making Muslims safe from your tongue and hand.'[3]

With regard to the common definition of Islām amongst Muslim thinkers, it has three constituents:

Firstly, confessing with the tongue that there is no god but God, and that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God; secondly, believing from the heart in everything that this Prophet proclaimed in matters of faith, law, ethics and the social system; and thirdly, living in practice according to all that Islām requires, by doing what it enjoins and refraining from what it forbids.

Thus, Al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī said about Islām:

1 Al-Fakhr al-Rāzī's *Commentary on the Qur'ān*, I, p. 432, Cairo, 1318/1900.

2 In the Arabic text the name of the Prophet is always followed by a conventional formula of respect. It will not be repeated throughout the translation: Muslim readers will utter the formula for themselves.

3 From a long Hadīth narrated by Ahmad, with a sound chain of authority.

'In addition to testifying to one's faith, it is believing with the heart and acting in deed, and resigning oneself to God in all that He has decreed and pre-ordained.

'In the same way, the Qur'ān says of Abraham (Peace be upon him):[4]

> *When his Lord said to him, 'submit!'* (aslim), *he said: I have submitted* (aslamtu) *to the Lord of the worlds.*

'And in this way, too, God said:

> *The true religion with God is Islām* (submission to God),

and in this way also Joseph prayed:

> *O make me to die musliman* (in true submission),

that is to say, 'Make me one of those who submit themselves to what pleases Thee!' It may also mean, 'Make me safe from captivity to Satan', who had vowed:

> *I shall seduce them all together, excepting Your faithful servants from amongst them.*

Moreover, God says to the Prophet:

> *You will not make anyone listen to you except those who believe in Our signs and thus are muslimūn* (submissive),

that is, they who yield to truth and submit to it.

And finally,

> *By which* (here referring to the Torah) *the Prophets who had submitted themselves* (aslamū) *to the Lord gave judgement.*[5]

However, whether we regard the word 'Islām' from its lexical or religious aspect, we find that it does not refer to a specific person, in the way Buddhism refers to the Buddha or the Zoroastrian faith to Zoroaster; it does not refer, either, to a specific people in the way Judaism refers to a specific people; nor does it denote a certain region or country, as do yet other religions. A religion which is related, or refers to a certain person, or people, or region, is necessarily limited in time by the survival of that person or people, and limited in space by their geographical location. In contrast to

4 This is the convential formula of respect used after mention of all prophets before Muhammad. It will not be used again in this text (see Note 2).

5 See the *Mufradāt* of al-Rāghib, under 'Islam'.

this the word 'Islām' knows no such limiting time or space, person or people.

So divorced is the word from any specific location that in considering it we are taken directly to an unlimited sphere which extends beyond the bounds of the globe. Nor is it limited in history by the era of the Muḥammadan mission. Thus our master, Noah said to his people:

> *If you turn from me, I have not asked you for any reward. No wages are due to me except from God, and I have been commanded to be of the muslimūn* (those who submit). *(X, 72)*

And the Qur'ān says of our master, Abraham:

> *Abraham was neither Jew nor Christian, but he was a man of pure faith, musliman* (submitting to God): *certainly he was no idolator. (III,67)*

Let us note that while our masters Abraham and Ishmael were raising up the foundation of the House of God[6] they prayed:

> *Accept this from us Lord, for You are indeed the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. Our Lord, make us muslimaini* (both submissive) *to You, and of our offspring a nation muslimah* (submissive) *to You, and show us our holy rites and turn to us. You are indeed the Oft-Turning, the Merciful.(II,128)*

Again, our Masters Abraham and Jacob did not omit to enjoin their sons to be submissive:

> *Abraham charged his sons with this, and Jacob likewise:*
> *My sons, God has chosen for you the religion – see that you die not except as muslimūn* (submitting to Him). *(II,132)*

And when death came to our master Jacob he was anxious to depart to his Lord feeling reassured about his sons, so he asked them:

> *What will you serve when I am gone? They replied: We will serve your God and the God of your forefathers, Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac – the One God – to Him we are muslimūn* (submissive). *(II, 132/3)*

And our master, Moses, said to his people:

> *If you believe in God, my people, put your trust in Him if you are truly muslimūn* (submissive to Him). *(X, 84)*

6 The Ka'ba in Mecca.

And our master, Joseph, turned to God in gratitude and prayer:

> *Lord, You have given me to rule, and You have taught me the interpretation of dreams. Originator of the heavens and earth, You are my Protector in this world and in the next! Make me die musliman* (in true submission) *and join me with the righteous.* *(XII, 101)*

And God inspired Jesus' Apostles:

> *Believe in Me and My Messenger. They said: We believe – witness that we are muslimūn* (submissive). *(V, 111)*

And when Jesus perceived his people's unbelief, he asked them:

> *Who are my helpers in the cause of God? The Apostles replied: We are the helpers of God – we believe in Him: witness that we are muslimūn* (submissive to Him). *(III, 52)*

The naming of followers of Islām in the present era as Muslims is now seen to have taken place long before their time. Here is a Qur'ānic verse which, referring to Abraham, specifies certain aspects of the mission which God has laid upon the shoulders of the Muslim nation, in which there is a Divine directive which should be the motto of every Muslim:

> *And struggle for God as is His due, for He has chosen you, and has laid on you no impediment in your religion, being the creed of your father, Abraham. He named you Muslims in former times, and in this the Messenger may testify against you, and you may testify against your fellow-men. So keep up the prayer, pay the alms-tax and hold fast to God: he is your Protector, an excellent Protector, and an excellent Helper.* *(XXII, 78)*

It is self-evident that Islām must exist entirely independently of the constructions of space or time, and no two persons would differ about its basis, for its essential principles would gain nothing but acceptance and submission from all sincere souls. In this way the Qur'ān reveals the essence of Islām in a few words which can command only respect and belief, where there is due sincerity in the heart of the receiver. Thus God addressed the Prophet:

> *Say: It is revealed unto me that your God is One God – will you submit to Him?* *(XXI, 108)*

He is also commanded when addressing the People of the Book[7] to say to them:

> *Oh People of the Book! Come now to a word that is common to both of us, that we serve none but God and we associate none with Him and do not take any from among us as lords apart from God. And if they turn away say: Bear witness that we are muslims.* *(III, 64)*

In another verse God delineates the true believer and true Messenger, indicating in passing the difference between belief and unbelief:

> *No mortal to whom God has given the Scriptures and whom He has endowed with judgement and prophethood would say to men, 'Worship me instead of God', but rather, 'Be God-orientated, for you have studied and taught the scriptures.' Nor would he order you to serve the Angels and the Prophets as your Gods: what, would he order you to disbelieve after you had submitted?* *(III, 79–80)*

Thus in a general, all-embracing way, God explains the nature of religious belief, in the form of a rhetorical question:

> *Who is there that has a better religion than he who surrenders himself entirely to God, doing good?* *(IV, 125)*

From all these verses we come to realize that the essence of Islām in the sphere of belief is surrendering oneself to God which means, in the first instance, believing in the Unity of God and then that the Unity of God demands that we worship none but Him. It implies that we equate nothing with Him, put no person nor anything before Him and reverence Him alone. It demands, further, that we do not take the Angels or Prophets for Lords: we must be entirely God-orientated, turning to Him alone, and putting our sole hope and trust in Him.

In the sphere of morals, the essence of Islām is Iḥsān which the Prophet defined as 'worshipping God as if you can see Him, and knowing that if you cannot see Him, yet nonetheless He sees you'. The state of being God-orientated applies both to the realm of belief and that of morals; in the latter it means adopting the morals which God has enjoined. Islām, then, demands total surrender to God and fullness of worship, as if the servant can actually see Him.

7 Referring to the Jews and the Christians.

Naturally it is held that nobody would refuse to surrender his face[8] to God, except those who are completely lacking in religious feeling.

It follows, therefore, that Islām, or self-surrender, is the path of guidance. Hence the Qur'ānic verse:

> *Whomsoever God desires to guide, He expands his breast to Islām. (VI, 125)*
>
> *And he whose breast has been expanded to Islām receives light from his Lord. (XXXIX, 22)*

Submission to God is explained by Him through the example of the Prophet, whom he addressed in the Qur'ān:

> *Say: My prayers, my ritual sacrifice, my living, my dying – all belong to God, the Lord of all Being. No peer has He. Thus I have been commanded, and I am the first of those who submit. (VI, 162)*

Perhaps the first verse that was revealed from the Qur'ān indicates this equally well, and that it was an instruction from the beginning of the entire mission that everything should be done in the Name of God, and not in that of any other being or creature:

> *Recite in the Name of Thy Lord who created (man). (XCVI, 1)*

The same point was made in other verses:

> *Eat not of that over which God's Name has not been mentioned: it is ungodliness. (VI, 121)*

Islām, or surrender to God is, then, Religion in the absolute sense, as well as religion in its everyday practice, since there can be no religion other than surrendering oneself to God. Whatever definition may be offered for 'religion', its true quality lies in this.

It follows, therefore, that the word 'Islām' is the perfect definition of 'religion' and it also follows that the proposition:

> *Verily the true religion with God is Islām (III, 19)*

is equally exact. The next proposition, which is based on this, is again undoubtedly exact:

> *Whosoever desires a religion other than Islām, it shall not be accepted of him; in the next world he shall be among the losers. (III, 85)*

8 The face is the most sublime part of the body, and a worshipper commits it to God, turning it towards him.

Whoever rejects submission to God rejects religion itself. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Qur'ān speaks of a group of sincere followers from among the People of the Book who, as soon as the Qur'ān was read to them, declared that they were indeed Muslim and that they had in fact been Muslims before the Qur'ān had come to their attention:

> *We have sent our Word to them so that they may be reminded. Those to whom we gave the Scriptures before this believed in it, and when it is recited to them, they say, 'We believe in it; surely it is the truth from our Lord. Indeed, even before it was revealed we had surrendered.' Those shall be given their recompense twice over.* (XXVIII,51)

The logical conclusion from this, therefore, is declared by the Qur'ān itself:

> *He*[9] *has ordained for you as religion that with which He charged Noah and that which We have revealed to you, and that with which We charged Abraham, Moses and Jesus, saying: Observe this faith, and be not divided regarding it; but that to which you call them is unacceptable to the idolators. God chooses for Himself whom He will; and guides to Himself those who repent.* (XLII, 13)

Similarly, the Prophet is addressed in the Qur'ān:

> *Say: We believe in God and that which has been sent down to us, and sent down to Abraham and Ishmael, Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes, and in that which was given to Moses and Jesus, and the Prophets of their Lord: we make no distinction between them, and to him we surrender.* (III, 84)

Surrendering oneself to God is the same as believing in His Unity and worshipping Him accordingly. If the distinguishing feature of Christianity in the present era is, according to al-Bayrūnī, its doctrine of the Trinity, the distinguishing mark of Islām, as he truly observed, is the doctrine of Unity, in which God alone is singled out for Lordship: creating, giving and withholding.

> *Say: Lord, Master of Sovereignty, You bestow sovereignty on whom You will and take it away from whom You will: You exalt whom You will and You abase whomsoever You will: all that is good is in Your hand; You have power over everything.* (III, 26)

9 God talks of Himself as "He" and "We" in the Qur'ān, often in the same verse, as here.

God Almighty invests the entire Kingdom in its small and large aspects, in health, strength, glory and fame, means of livelihood and wealth; and He possesses it in matters of the heart; for the heart of a man or woman is held between two fingers of God the Compassionate. He undertakes the guidance of that heart, and whomsoever God guides, no man can lead astray. He controls the Hereafter (*The Master of the Day of Judgement*). He, the High and Exalted, has absolute authority over great and small. Not an atom's weight nor anything smaller or bigger than that escapes His Knowledge, Power, Will or Wisdom, in earth or in the Heavens, and His guardianship over all is comprehensive, embracing and absolute.

Let us now return to the verse:

> *Say, 'People of the Book, come now to a word that is common to both of us – that we serve none but God and that we associate none with Him, and do not take any from among us as Lords, apart from God.' And if they turn away, say: Bear witness that we are Muslims.* *(III, 64)*

This means that if they do not admit these beliefs, the fact that he is a Muslim should be declared, that is, his belief in the Unity of God.

In fact, Islām, like other religions before it in their original clarity and purity, is nothing other than the declaration of the Unity of God, and its message is a call to testify to this Unity, since the basic essence of Islām and all its teachings and principles point to It, while all the ritual practices are intended to make man aware of It.

To begin with, we have the first statement of belief: *I bear witness that there is no god but God,* the eternal Divine Message, and secondly: *I bear witness that Muḥammad is His Messenger,* who transmitted the Message. These two statements sum up the doctrine of the Unity of God.

So the duty to declare this Unity is the basis and essence of Islam, but it is not a mere expression without foundation in the heart and feelings. Unless a man's belief in the Unity of God dominates him completely, penetrating all areas of his feeling and awareness, soaking up his heart and soul, moulding the activity of his body and directing him to the right goal, his faith cannot be complete. In order to make it possible for a man to uphold God's

Unity in a practical way, Islamic rites were introduced. Thus the ritual prayer is, in essence, separation from all other than God in order to be connected with Him, and thus it bears witness to the Unity of God. Hence the prayer begins with the words, 'God is Supreme' (*Allāhu akbar*), to make the person feel from the outset that God is greater than all masters and individuals to whom one may attach one's hopes and expectations, and that that hope should be set on Him alone, for He is greater than all creatures and more exalted and powerful.

Then follow all the positions of prayer: reciting while standing upright, followed by the positions of bending forward, kneeling, prostration with forehead on the ground, and the final formula said while sitting; the aim being to declare in every movement and position the separation from all other than God in order to face only towards Him and to surrender oneself to Him.

As for fasting, it is raising oneself for a period of time above matter, bad thought and language, and bad action, for the sake of pleasing God. It is raising oneself above human imperfection, which manifests itself in passions, words or deeds, so that the soul may be freed for a period of time to contemplate the perfection of God. It is an attempt to take on certain qualities which are in the nature of God, since He is Absolute Perfection, lacking nothing, and any man aspiring towards perfection must assume those aspects of it which God desires of him. Fasting, then, is raising the self above human imperfection in the cause of submitting to the Oneness of God.

Likewise, zakāh[10] (alms-tax) aims at the same goal. It is expending material things such as humans run after and almost worship, and devoting them to God; it means relinquishing that which has once been gained for the gratification of the self and the passions, and devoting it to the purposes of God.

As for the Pilgrimage – may God grant us to do it every year! – it is from beginning to end a withdrawal from the world towards God. It is divesting oneself of the past, since it begins with

10 The Arabic word, 'zakāh' means both charity and also a statutory portion of one's wealth given every year for the use of the needy and other services. The word has the added significance of purification of a man's soul and wealth by spending in this way, thereby making his soul and wealth increase.

renunciation of one's sins, that is, those periods of life during which one was heedless and distracted from remembering God and which led to serving another instead of God, making a lord of one's passions and thus falling into disobedience and sin. For the pilgrimage one even discards the clothes of the past and from the first moment engages in 'responding' to God alone. This responding is a pure declaration of the Unity of God: it is a complete answer to the order to abandon all substitutes for God:

> *I respond to Thee, O Lord, I respond: Praise, Grace and Kingdom belong to Thee, without equal: I respond.*

By raising their voices with this call, which has sweet fragrance and a glittering brilliance which ascends to the heavens whose gates open for it, the pilgrims rally under the banner of the Unity of God.

The rites of the Pilgrimage follow each other in succession, whether obvious and outward, or inward and symbolic, and transcending the visible action: declaring the Unity and calling It out,[11] circumambulating Its central symbol,[12] running for the sake of It,[13] or standing looking up to It,[14] praying to God to accept the pilgrims into the band of those followers of all prophets who declared the Unity of God. God addressed the Prophet:

> *We never sent a Messenger before you except that We revealed to him, saying: There is no god but I, so serve Me.* (*XXI, 25*)

These are some aspects of upholding the Oneness of God in one's beliefs. Now we come to upholding it in morals. The essence of this is that all personal and social behaviour should spring from a divine teaching. Upholding God's Unity in the field of morals manifests itself first in the intention held by the person when he decided that all his acts and all his absentions are for the sake of God alone. In other words, his whole life must be for God, and not only his life but also his death. In general, upholding the Unity of God is to give oneself to Him when standing and when sitting, in

11 The responding formula, here translated.

12 Circumambulating the Kaʿba.

13 The rite of running between the two hills, al-Safā and al-Marwa, in commemoration of the running of Ishmael's mother, Hagar, in search of water.

14 The rite of standing on Mount ʿArafat.

sleep and in waking, in speech and in silence, in anger and in satisfaction, in friendship and in enmity, in buying and in selling, in work and in rest, in one's passing thoughts and in one's settled opinions, in teaching and in suggesting, in advising and in warning.

As an all-embracing law, we repeat again that upholding the Unity of God is to direct one's prayers, rites, life and death towards God alone, the Lord of all beings. The more closely a man comes to this Unity in his beliefs, morals and intentions, the nearer he is to fulfiling the Islamic ideal. The Quran states:

> *To God belongs sincere religion.* *(XXXIX 3)*

referring by that to its being free from any trace of contamination, whether in beliefs or in morals, which begin with the intention.

More than anyone else, God is above the need for an associate, so if any man does something in the Name of God *and* of other than Him, He will disassociate Himself from it. In a Holy Utterance[15] God says:

> *I am above partners, so if anyone does something for Me and for another I will leave it for the other.*

And the Prophet said,

> 'It is the intention behind the action that counts in deeds and everyone receives according to what he intends; so whoever migrates intending it for God and His Messenger, his migration is for God and His Messenger, and whoever migrates intending to have some wordly gain or a woman to marry, his migration is for that.'

All this leads us to the true meaning of Islām, which, as already stated, is surrendering oneself to God. We repeat the exalted saying of the Prophet narrated by the noble companion, ʿAmr ibnʿAbsah:

> 'A man said, "Messenger of God, what is Islām?" The Prophet (May God's Grace and Peace be upon him) said, "It consists in making over your heart entirely to God and in the safety of Muslims from your tongue and your hand." '[16]

15 Recorded by Ahmad on sound authority. The words and meaning of the Qur'ān are from God, whereas in a Holy Utterance the meaning is from God, but the words are the Prophet's. In the Prophet's own sayings the meanings and the words are his.

16 Recorded by al-Bukhārī, Muslim and al-Tirmidhi in a long saying of the Prophet.

There is no doubt that the fact that Muslims are safe from a man's tongue and hand springs from the subjection of his heart to God; this safety is thus in accordance with the saying of the noble Prophet:

'Had his heart been submissive, his limbs would have been submissive', and in accordance with his saying, as narrated by al-Nuʿmān ibn Bashīr:

> 'There is in the body a piece of flesh which, if it is sound, the whole body will be sound, and if it is unsound the whole body will be unsound, and that is the heart.'

Someone may ask, "How does one surrender oneself to God? What are the means and what is the way one should follow? As for the means, they are the divine principles which God laid down through the tongue of His Prophet, whether in the Qur'ān or in his sayings and actions.[17] Anyone wishing to surrender to God must refer to the Qur'ān and the Prophet's sayings and actions. Anyone desiring guidance to the way of the good life of religion and morality will inevitably refer to the pages of the Qur'ān and to the sayings and actions of the Prophet. That is because the Qur'ān is the only text in the world in which the Divine Speech explaining religion has been preserved (by God's preservation), without alteration either by addition or omission. The Qur'ān did not merely preserve the Divine Revelation in meaning; it preserved the Speech itself, and this is a status to which no other work can aspire, for it reveals a degree of accuracy and truth not equalled, or approximated by any other. It is a source of great pride to the Muslims that in their religion they refer to the Divine Text itself in all its accuracy, freshness, blessing, brilliance and splendour. It is a glory to the Arabic language that it preserves this text intact:

> *A Book whose Verses are perfected and then made distinctly clear, from One All-Wise, All-Aware.* *(XI, 1)*

As for the conclusion at which we wish to arrive, it is that religion, surrendering oneself to God, upholding the Unity of God, and Islām all have the same meaning, each explaining and

17 The sayings and actions of the Prophet are known as Ḥadīth (s.)/Aḥādīth (pl.), translated by the words, 'saying', or 'tradition'.

enlightening the other; all are universal, absolute, and unlimited in time or space.

The word 'Islām' in its very sound and completeness is the best description of them all. This general statement needs to be explained in detail in the following chapters.

> *This day have I consummated your religion for you, and completed My blessing upon you, and chosen for you Islam to be your religion. (V, 3)*

II. GOD EXISTS

In our observations of the universe as a whole we find so close an interrelation of its components that it can be said with certainty that every part, from the heavens to the earth and what lies in between – both the inhabited places and the mountains and valleys, the plants and animals – comprise a unity whose parts are complementary and mutually bound together. Such a structure, whose billion billions of parts are thus interconnected, repudiates altogether any theory derived from 'blind nature', or 'co-incidence and chance'. When these explanations are put aside it emerges that the universe must have a maker. Observe this celebration of interdependence in the following verses:

> *Let man reflect on the food he eats: how We poured out the rain abundantly, and split the earth into fissures, and how We then made the grains to grow, and vines and reeds, olives and palms and gardens and fruits and pastures – an enjoyment for you and your cattle to delight in.* *(LXXX 24)*

Observe again the connexion between the heavens and the earth and between water and plants:

> *Have you not seen how God has sent down from the heavens water, which penetrates the earth and collects as springs? Then how with it He brings forth crops of diverse hues, which wither, turn yellow, and then He crumbles them into chaff? Clearly in that stands a reminder for men of understanding.* *(XXXIX, 21)*

This inherent connexion between the different realms of the universe is termed by philosophers 'the teleological proof', or 'the proof from purpose', from the fact that everything in the universe is intended, and coincidence contributes nothing to its purpose-

fulness, nor chance. Consider the purpose and goal in the following verses:

> *Have they not beheld the sky above them, how We have built it and adorned it, leaving no cracks? And how We spread out the earth and set upon it immovable mountains and how We made to grow therein pairs of every joyous kind for an insight and a reminder to every penitent man; and how We sent down out of Heaven blessed water with which to bring forth gardens and harvest rains and tall palm trees laden with date-clusters, sustenance for men, thereby giving new life to some dead land? – Such will be the Resurrection. (L, 6–11)*

We may truly reflect on the following verses:

> *It is God who sends down water out of the sky, and with it quickens the earth after it was dead. Surely in that is a sign for a people who have ears to hear. In cattle, too, there is a lesson for you; we give you to drink of what is in their bellies, between filth and blood – pure milk, sweet to those who drink. And we give you the fruits of the palms and the vines from which you derive sweet-tasting liquid and fair provision. Indeed this is a sign for men of understanding. And your Lord inspired the bees, saying, 'Build your homes in the mountains, in the trees and in the thatch of roofs, then feed on every kind of fruit and follow the ways of your Lord, so easy to go upon.' Then there comes forth out of their bellies a liquid of various colours wherein is healing for men. Truly in this is a sign for a people who reflect. (XVI, 65–69)*

Maintaining the World through Knowledge, Direction and Care

Another idea occurs in the minds of some people, namely that this purposeful interconnexion, this intended mutual coherence, came about with its fixed laws and unchanging rules and was an operation which must needs work in this way, and that God finished creating it and fashioning it with precision, so that it now runs according to what was decreed for it by God. It moves automatically according to the intended purpose, in keeping with laws which God has laid down and does not interfere with: it moves of its own accord without the will of God entering into every action or inaction, speech or silence.

But this is not so. The true Islamic perspective is that God holds in His hand this interconnected structure at every moment and throughout every second, for if He were to abandon anything in it for the twinkling of any eye, it would dissolve and vanish. God says:

God holds the Heavens and the Earth lest they cease to be: should they cease to be, none would hold them in existence other than He. Surely He is All-Clement, All-Forgiving. *(XXXV, 41)*

It is He who holds the birds in the sky:

Have they not regarded the birds that are made subservient in the air of the heavens? Naught holds them but God! Surely therein are signs for a people who believe! *(XVI, 79)*

Have they not regarded the birds above them, spreading their wings and closing them? Naught holds them but the All-Merciful; surely He sees everything! *(LXVII, 19)*

God is the Possessor of Sovereignty. He grants it at any moment to whomsoever He wishes, and takes it back at any moment, likewise. It is He who ordains the night and day at the sunrise and sunset, and it is He who grants life and reclaims it, whenever a creature is born or dies.

And he says:

Say: O Lord, Master of Sovereignty, You bestow sovereignty on whom You will and take it away from whom You will; You exalt whomsoever You will and You abase whomsoever You will: all that is good is in Your hand; You have power over everything; You cause the night to pass into the day and the day into the night; You bring forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living, and You provide for whomsoever You will without reckoning. *(III, 26-27)*

The good reader will observe the use of the present tense throughout these verses, which in Arabic indicates the present and the future, and there are many verses in this vein. God says, for instance:

He it is who shapes you in the womb as He wills; there is no god but He, the All-Mighty, the All-Wise. *(III, 6)*

And among His signs is that He looses the winds, bringing good tidings, so that He may let you taste of His Mercy [the rain], *and that the ships may run at His commandment, and that you may seek His bounty, and render thanks to Him.* *(XXX, 46)*

God is He who looses the winds that stir up clouds, spreading them in heaven how He will and breaking them; then you see the rain issuing from within them and He sends it down on those servants whom He chooses. How they rejoice, although before it was sent down on them they were in despair! Behold, then, the marks of God's Mercy, how He quickens the earth after it was dead –

truly He is the Quickener of the dead and He is the All-Powerful over everything! *(XXX, 48–50)*

There is no doubt that God created, determined and made the laws and set the rules: this is one thing. Maintaining it once it has been initiated is quite another matter. So, after the creation follows the maintenance, which is continuous and unending. This is the meaning of 'al-Qayyūmīyyah', one of the attributes of God, for 'al-Qayyūm' is one of His Names, which means 'the Self-Subsistent One by whom everything exists and continues to be'.

Does 'maintenance' mean simply 'upholding the universe'? No, it is maintaining it with care, and direction in accordance with this knowledge, lest it disappear. Such is the essential meaning of the prayer, 'Lord, leave me not to myself for the twinkling of an eye, or for less than that'. This is because if God were to leave a person to himself physically he would disintegrate, because He is upholding him, and if He leaves man to himself spiritually he would fall an easy prey to Satan, temptation or evil. This maintaining care embraces the universe with an all-inclusive, all-embracing knowledge. He says in His Book:

He knows the Secret and that which is yet more hidden *(XX, 7)*

It is obvious what is meant by the Secret – as for what is even more hidden, it is anything in the unconscious, and:

He knows the treachery of the eyes and what the breasts conceal.(XL, 19)

He knows the unseen as well as the seen:

God knows what every female bears and the womb shrinking and swelling; everything with Him has its measure – the Knower of the unseen and the visible, the All-Great, the All-Exalted. It is all the same whether any of you conceal his speech, or proclaim it, or whether any of you hide himself in the night or go forth in broad daylight. *(XIII, 8–10)*

His knowledge is not confined to the past or the present: it includes the future. He says:

Every misfortune that befalls the earth or your own person is ordained in a Book, before We bring it into being: that is easy for God. *(LVII, 22)*

As He has declared that His knowledge is all-embracing by saying that He knows the unseen and the seen (the unseen here is the world of metaphysics, and the seen the world of physics), He

also elaborates this truth in its intricate parts and details, making it clear that He knows the insignificant and small, as well as the great:

> *With Him are the keys of the unseen; none knows them but He. He knows what is in land and sea; not a leaf falls but He knows it; not a grain in the darkness of the earth, not a thing, fresh or withered, but it is recorded in a clearly laid-out Book. It is He who makes you sleep like the dead by night, and He knows how you work by day; then He raises you up therein, to fulfil your alotted span of life; then unto Him shall you return. Then He will inform you of all that you have done.* (VI, 59–60)

Again He says:

> *He knows what penetrates into the earth and what comes forth from it, what comes down from heaven and what goes up to it – he is the All-Compassionate, the All-Forgiving. The unbelievers say, 'The hour of Doom will never come to* us*!' Say, 'Yes indeed, by my Lord, it shall come to you, by Him who knows the unseen – not so much as the weight of an atom in heaven or earth escapes Him, nor is there anything smaller or greater but it is recorded in a clearly laid-out Book'.* (XXXIV, 2–3)

We have been discussing the divine maintenance of the universe with knowledge, and this, in fact, is inseparable from maintaining it with care in the right direction. This latter is based upon the first, and indivisible from it. We begin our discussion on this maintenance with direction by saying that it is an act of Grace. The divine direction will always care for man, directing him, out of solicitude, providing him with life itself and pleasure in life, for God has shaped everything in such a way as to make them accord with the true interests of man.

The Care of God for the Universe

So far we have used expressions like 'purposeful interrelationship', 'upholding' and 'direction': now we will use the word, 'care'. God the Almighty cares for the universe and His concern is all-pervading. The word 'care' does not take us away from the atmosphere of purposeful interrelationship or upholding and direction, but it tinges the discussion of the proof of God's existence with a tender and personal hue. When the proof is coloured with this gentle, kindly tint, it is called 'the proof of caring'. The Qur'ān

is brimming with words directing people's attention to God's care for the universe, and especially for man in the universe. God's Mercy abounds with grace towards man:

> *Have we not assigned to him two eyes, a tongue and two lips and pointed out to him the two paths* (of right and wrong)*?* *(XC, 8–10)*

> *And among His signs is that He created for you of yourselves, spouses, that you might repose in them, and He has set between you love and mercy – surely in that are signs for those who reflect.* *(XXX, 21)*

> *And surely We have honoured the descendants of Adam and carried them on land and sea, provided them with good things and exalted them above many of our creatures.* *(XVII, 70)*

God speaks of the numerous favours which He bestows. He refers to the favour of night and day in these words:

> *Say, 'Think! If God should make the night unceasing above you, until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than God shall bring you illumination? Can you not hear?' Say, 'Think! If God should make the day unceasing above you, until the Day of Resurrection, what god other than God shall bring you night to repose in? Can you not see? Out of His Mercy He has appointed for you night and day, for you to repose in and seek his bounty, so that you may give Him thanks.'* *(XXVIII, 71–73)*

This proof of caring is one of the most beautiful proofs of the existence of God, Who says:

> *Do you not see how God has subjected to you whatever is in the heavens and earth, and how He has lavished on you His visible and unseen favours? Yet among men there are those who dispute concerning God, without knowledge or guidance or an enlightening Scripture.* *(XXXI, 30)*

To deduce that God exists from the proof of his concern is as old as mankind. Every human being feels that he is encircled by God's favour, both inside and outside Him. God expresses the idea which every person can imagine, upon some slight reflection:

> *If you reckoned up God's blessings you would never be able to count them.* *(XVI, 18)*

Socrates, father of philosophers, silenced Aristodemos with similar reasoning. He asked him:

'"Is there anyone whose skill in his craft pleases you?"

Aristodemos answered, "Yes", and named the man he considered the most skilful contemporary poet. Then Socrates asked, "Whom do you consider higher - one who makes statues without life and intellect, or one who makes living, moving figures?" He answered, "He who makes living forms, unless these forms were by coincidence a chance handiwork and not the work of intelligence". Socrates said, "If we suppose that there are certain things, the purpose of which we cannot see, and others whose purpose and use are obvious, what do you say of them? Which are the work of intelligence and which the work of coincidence?" He answered, "There is no doubt that things whose purpose and use are obvious are the work of intelligence." Socrates said, "Do you not see that the Maker of man, when He first made him, created means of sensing because of their obvious use, giving him sight and ears to see and hear what is appropriate for his life? And what is the use of splendid things to smell if we did not have the nostrils, and how would we perceive the taste of things and distinguish the bitter, sweet and tangy, if we did not have the tongue with which to taste? Our sight is exposed to harmful things. Can you not see that the divine power looked after this and gave us eyelids like shutters, to stop what may harm the sight, and made the lashes like a seive to protect the eyes from any harm in the wind? And what do you say of the hearing organ? It receives all sorts of sounds and never gets full! You see how the front teeth of animals are arranged, prepared to cut the food and then to send it back to the molars! If you reflect on such arrangements, can you still doubt whether all this has come about by coincidence, ir is the product of intelligence?" Aristodemos said, "Yes, indeed, if we reflect on this we will not doubt that they are the work of a Wise Creator, Who cares much for His creation." '[18]

The care of God which pervades the whole universe which man can apprehend with his seeing eyes and hearing ears and thinking mind and speaking tongue, and which he can observe in every grace of God around him, in which he is steeped, excludes all

18 Quotation taken from Devid Santillana MSS.

chance and coincidence. That structure which controls all our aims and attainments also excludes chance and coincidence.

The Proof of Composition

Let us now talk about composition and how it may guide us to the Creator. Take one of the simplest possible constructions, the mattock, which the peasant uses in the field, or the hammer which the craftsman uses in his work. If a man passes by the mattock and observes a long smooth piece of wood to which a piece of iron has been firmly fixed, would he think that this happened through pure chance? If such reasoning would not hold in a simple, easy case like this, it would never hold for a complex structure like a watch or a radio set, for instance.

As the late Dr. Muḥammad Abdullah Draz said,

> 'Imagine a house whose rooms are well provided with luxurious furniture, standing on a high mountain surrounded by a thick forest; suppose that a man came across this house but could not find anybody nearby. Suppose that he thought that rocks from the mountain had been scattered around and then automatically collected together to take the shape of this splendid palace with its bedrooms, chambers, corridors and fittings; that the trees in the wood had split of their own accord into boards and formed themselves into doors and beds, seats and tables, each taking its place in the palace; that the fibres from the plants and wool and hair of the animals of their own accord had changed into embroidered cloth and then were cut into carpets, pillows and cushions and dispersed about the rooms and settled onto the sofas and chairs; that lamps and chandeliers by themselves had fallen into this palace from all directions and fixed themselves into the ceilings, singly and in groups - would you not conclude that this must be a dream or a legend, or the reasoning of someone disturbed in his mind?
>
> 'What, then, do you think of a palace whose ceiling is the sky, whose floor is the earth, whose pillars are the mountains, whose ornamentation is the plants and whose lamps are the stars, moon and sun? In the correct judgement of the intellect, can it be of lesser importance than that house? Is it not more likely to direct the attention and mind to a Shaping Creator, Alive, Self-Subsistent, Who created and shaped and Who determined and guided?'

We have not yet finished talking about chance. We must ask,

when has chance ever built a palace? Indeed, when has it made one single room with a door and windows? When has it even produced a well-made door, a mere door?

And do you think that if a man brought millions of printing letters and began to move them around day after day, week after week, year after year, that he would obtain from them, by chance, a composition which is a book of literature, philosophy, or mathematics? As the orientalist Devid Santillana said, even after moving them around for generations, after all his toil he would still be left with individual letters. If this is so, as Santillana continues, how can we imagine that this universe, with the perfection and harmony between its individual parts and their amazing compatibility with each other, could ever have come about through random movement in a limitless void, as the materialists imagine? There is no doubt that rational people would agree with Aristotle that 'Every order bespeaks the intelligence behind it'.

Similarly, al-Kindī, the first Muslim philosopher (185–252/801–866), considered that the evidence of craftsmanship in a door, couch or chair, with its design and perfected order, does not reveal its maker any less than the universe reveals its omnipotent Creator. People of complete integrity would not doubt this. If we observe the world in its totality, as al-Kindī says, we find it well-arranged with its parts interlocking, designed according to a most useful and perfect order, with some parts the source of others and some acting counter to them. All this is clear to anyone with a comprehensive view. Al-Kindī adds that the external manifestations and phenomena that register upon the senses give the clearest indication of the design of the first Planner:

> 'There is, in the organization of this universe and its arrangement, the fact that some of its parts affect others, while some are led by others and some make others subservient; and in the perfection of its shape in the best possible form; in the existence of every being and the dissolution of every dissolving thing and in the firmness of every firm thing and in the disappearance of every vanishing thing, a most complex indication of shaping and organization: and with every plan there is a Planner and an embodiment of the most practical wisdom, and behind all wisdom there is a Wise One. The fact that planning requires a Planner and wisdom a Wise One is something about which no two persons can disagree.'

The above manner of demonstration is the method which Kant, the greatest philosopher of Germany, declared to be the clearest and strongest proof of the existence of God. It is the way that has been followed by many thinkers from East and West. All these proofs of the existence of God may be summed up in the following verses from the chapter in the Qur'ān called 'The Great News'.

> *Did We not spread the earth as a bed, and raise the mountains as pillars? And did We not create you in pairs and appoint your sleep for a rest, and appoint night as a mantle and the day for your livelihood? And did We not build above you seven mighty heavens, and appoint a refulgent lamp, and did we not send down abundant water cascading from the clouds, that We may bring forth thereby grain and plants and gardens thick with foliage?(LXXVIII, 6–16)*

The presence of God is too obvious to need further demonstration. The proofs of purpose, caring and composition about which we have been speaking are but one proof, each being named after the beautiful aspect under which it appears. They are no more than effects which point to a cause, and may be clearly seen – just as the track indicates the passage of the passer-by, as the beduin said of old, so the heavens with its signs of the zodiac and the earth with its pathways immediately proclaim the All-Wise and All-Knowing Creator.

This method, which requires proof for the existence of God is not the only one in the Islamic tradition, however. Now that we have demonstrated the concept of proof, in accordance with the fashion of our times, we shall briefly, with the aid of God, demonstrate another approach to this subject.

God is, in the minds of believers, manifestly obvious. He is more obvious than all else; indeed the Effector is more obvious than the effect and the Creator more evident than his creation, while the Bringer-into-Existence is more crystal-clear than the forms which have been brought into existence. One of the Names of God is 'al-Ẓāhir' ('the Outwardly Manifest'). Tāj al-Dīn ibn Aṭā'llāh al-Sakandarī, a leading savant in Islamic Law, as well as being a renowned mystic, considers this meaning in a number of aphorisms of typically fine craftsmanship. In Arabic the basic formula remains unchanged, but in each aphorism telling details differ, giving to each aphorism a pleasing and subtle significance. He says, among other things, the following:

'How can it be conceived that something conceals Him,

When it was He Who made everything manifest?
How can it be conceived that something conceals Him,
When it was He Who was manifest before the existence of everything?
How can it be conceived that something conceals Him,
When He is nearer to you than everything?
How can it be conceived that something conceals Him,
When, but for Him, nothing would have come into existence?
Great is the difference between Him through Whom we prove things,
And those things which we need to prove;
God, through whom we prove things, made truth known to His people,
Thus proving it by its Origin:
Seeking to prove God is a sign of not finding your way to Him:
Otherwise, when was He ever absent so that we need to prove Him?
When was He ever far away that we should need His traces to lead us to Him?

As for seeking to prove the Effector by the effect, ibn Aṭā'llāh speaks thus in his prayer to God:

'My Lord, how can we seek to prove You with what depends on You for its very existence?
Can it be possible that other than You is more manifestly obvious than You, so that it can make You manifest?
When wert You ever absent, that
You need a proof to lead to You?
When wert You ever far away, that traces may lead us to You?

But this is a Ṣūfī method, to which we only refer, without going more deeply into it here.

III. MUHAMMAD IS THE MESSENGER OF GOD

And I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.[19]

To a Muslim, there is no escape from admitting the above statement. Bearing witness that there is no good but God and testifying that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God are admissions of belief that are complementary aspects of the one faith, inseparable one from the other.

How do we bear witness that Muḥammad is the Messenger of God? The great religious scholar, al-Ghāzalī said,

> 'If you doubt whether a certain person is a prophet or not, you will have no certainty except by knowing his condition, either by observing him yourself or by hearing from people who themselves have heard it in an uninterrupted and reliable transmission from those who saw it.
>
> 'If you know about medicine or jurisprudence you can recognize physicians or jurists by knowing what they are like or by hearing what they say, or by observing them directly. You can thus tell for yourself, not being obliged to have recourse to others who know it, that al-Shafᶜi is a jurist and Galen a physician. You would even be able to learn some medicine or jurisprudence and read the books and writings of these two men and, in the nature of things, you would soon find out what they are like. The position would be the same once you understood the meaning of Prophethood.'

Let us observe something of the brilliance and splendour of this

19 In discussing the existence of God we followed the approach that it is a matter that needs proving; as for proving the truth of the blessed Prophet, the Qur'ān directs our attention to circumstances and conditions, arguments and proofs which demonstrate his truthfulness. Thus, if we attempt here to write at length about proving his truthfulness we are simply following the Qur'ānic approach.

Prophet as we follow the stages of his life.

He was descended from noble ancestors: history tells us about their eminence and high birth and about the noble deeds which they carried out for humanity and for the greater good. Quṣayy, for instance, who was one of the ancestors of the Prophet, built the Assembly Hall in Mecca, with its door facing the House of God. It was a chamber of counsel, a parliament and an executive body and even more than that: all the affairs of the tribe of Quraysh were settled there: deliberations, marriages and decisions about war. They would not tie the banner to the spear when appointing a commander for a campaign, whether for themselves or for others, except at this assembly, and it was Quṣayy who performed this ceremony. Men travelling with the camel caravans to trade would only depart from that spot and when they returned they would end their journey at the Assembly Hall in honour of Quṣayy, to seek his opinion and show appreciation of his standing. They would follow his command as if it were a religion laid down to be observed in his life and after his death.

Quṣayy's son, ʿAbd Manāf, followed him and he was also a notable man, pre-eminent among his people, as was in turn his son Hāshim, who saved the people of Mecca from dying of hunger in the lean years that struck them and depleted their wealth.

As for ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, the grandfather of the blessed Prophet, he was held a sage among his own tribe and all the Arabs. Some of the deeds recounted of him are upheld in the Qur'ān, such as the prohibition of incest, the institution of cutting off the hand of a thief and the prohibition of burying new-born girls alive.

All his biographers agree that the Prophet's father and mother were held high in moral esteem and birth, descended from the most noble and distinguished houses of Mecca. As the historian ibn Hishām said, in his lineage the blessed Prophet occupied the central place in the honourable chain of his people and he was of the noblest descent, both on his mother's and father's side. His birth marked the preliminary step towards achieving the purpose of Divine Wisdom in taking humanity out of darkness into light. His birth paved the way for this in the sense that God surrounded the Prophet in the period that preceded his mission with care and protection, so that he would be worthy of taking on the greatest

mission of preaching the universal religion and showing mankind the true significance of the relationship between man and God, and the responsibility in personal behaviour incumbent upon individuals. He set out to define the responsibility of every member of society, whether ruler or ruled, husband, father, son or brother, worker or manager, and so on, as it is included in the following Ḥadīth of the Prophet:

> 'Each of you is a shepherd and everyone of you shall be questioned respecting those, or that, of which he is shepherd: the leader is a shepherd and he will be questioned about those under his care; a man in his house is a shepherd and will be questioned about that which is under his governance; and the women in her husband's house is a shepherdess and shall be questioned about her domain of rule; and the servant is a shepherd in his master's wealth, and he will also be questioned about his domain of responsibility. So every one of you is a shepherd and every one of you shall be questioned in respect of what is under him.'

From the very time of his birth all the foundations of error and deviation began to be shaken. The biography of the Prophet alludes to this, using symbols which we shall look at, simply as expressive symbols.

Among the first stories is that about the night of his birth, when the water ebbed in the lake of Sāwā and caused the palace of Khosroes to crack, and the fire of the Zoroastrians to die out. As for the idols which were round the Ka'ba, their inevitable fate and sure destruction was to come: their days were numbered in years and days. The pillars of polytheistic error and heresy, injustice and tyranny, began to collapse from the time of the birth of the blessed Prophet. The appearance and spread of light, guidance and true direction were imminent.

The newly born baby was called Muḥammad: as for the reason for this, on one hand it is related of his mother, Āminah, that when she conceived him she had a visitation in which she learned that she had conceived the master of the nation and that when he fell to the ground at his birth she must say, 'I protect you in the Name of the One God from the evil of the envious', and that she should then call him Muḥammad (which means 'the Praised One'). On the other hand, it is told that when the baby was brought to be shown

to his grandfather, ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, he was asked, 'What do you call your grandson?' He answered, 'Muḥammad', so when he was asked, 'Why do you give him a name which is not the name of any of your forefathers or people?', he answered, 'I have hopes that all the people on earth will praise him'. This, as the story goes, was because he had had a dream which al-Qayrawānī narrated in his book, *Al-Bustān:*

> 'ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib saw in his sleep that it was as if a silver chain came out of his back, which had one end in the sky and one end in the earth, one in the East and one in the West; this charm became like a tree, with light on every single leaf and all the people of the East and West were as if they were clinging to it. He recounted his dream and it was interpreted that a child would be born in his descent who would be followed by the people of the East and West and that he would be praised by the dwellers of heaven and earth, and this is why he named him Muḥammad.'

His nurse, Ḥalīmah al-Saʿdiyyah, took young Muḥammad to live with her in the desert in the neighbourhood of Bani Saʿd. It is not surprising that this future prophet of light filled his journey from Mecca to her neighbourhood with joy and liveliness, hope and optimism. In the company of Muḥammad, in his innocence, purity and smiling childhood, and all his radiant freshness, Ḥalīmah and her husband, and even the beasts they rode on, felt very lively during the journey, for it was an easy one. He filled Ḥalīmah's dwelling with joy and delight and a radiant sense of life spread throughout the place and among its occupants (God give blessing to everything in it), so that the family were happy. Accordingly, as their gentleness and compassion towards Muḥammad increased, so he grew up in an atmosphere of kindness, friendliness and love. All this was planted in his growing soul and heart which were filled with the fresh shoots of the finest feelings and sensitivity. At this stage we come across yet another of these beautiful symbols which deepen the significance of his biography.

In his fourth year the age of discernment began. The Divine Care protected him with what is symbolically described in accounts of his life as 'The Splitting of the Breast'. This account is narrated by Muslim in his collection of Aḥādīth:

'It was narrated by Anas, a Companion of the Prophet, that Gabriel came to the blessed Messenger of God (as he was to be) while he was playing with young children, took him and laid him on the ground and cleaved open his breast, taking out of his heart a clot, and saying, 'This is Satan's mark in you'. Then he washed it in a golden basin in the water of Zamzam and joined the wound up again, having returned the heart to its place. His playmates ran to his foster-mother, telling her that he had been killed, so they all ran back and met him coming towards them, pale-faced.'

The mark of Satan was taken out of his heart at this early age, and so, as his mother Āminah said of him, 'By God, Satan will have no way to him'. And so it was: Satan had no way to the blessed Prophet, since God protected him completely throughout his life from any stain of impurity.

When the Prophet was still a strong youth, Mecca was full of all varieties of pleasures, passionate and impure – drinking halls were to be found all over the town, so were dubious places with lewd singers and dancers. Young men threw themselves into these pursuits, but the Almighty willed that Muḥammad should keep away from such things. Al-Bukhārī, in his collection of Aḥādīth, narrates that the blessed Prophet once said, 'I never considered following any of the pleasures of the Age of Barbarism[20] except on two occasions'. On each occasion he was looking after some sheep with a boy from his tribe, and he asked his companion to look after them instead so that he could go to Mecca, where there was a wedding celebration at which there would be delights and music. Both times, as he was approaching the house to join in, sleep overtook him and he slept until he felt the rays of the risen sun. These incidents show how God protected the blessed Prophet from the evils and corrupt behaviour of the Age of Barbarism.

The above narrative incidentally tells us that before his mission Muḥammad worked at times as a shepherd. He did this in the neighbourhood of Banī Sa'd and in Mecca, and he later told us in one of his sayings that 'The missions came to Moses while he was a shepherd, also to David, and the message came to me, too, when I was a shepherd looking after the sheep for my people at Ajyād'. The author of *Al-Rawḍ al-'Unuf* comments that God willed that

20 The Pre-Islamic period.

His prophets should work as shepherds in this way in preparation for their becoming shepherds of nations which would be under their care.

And so the period of youth passed, and the blessed Prophet was still pure and untainted.

Because of what they had seen, observed and ascertained of his qualities in which his integrity appeared manifest and brilliant, everybody described him as 'Al-Amīn' ('The Honest One'). He was honest with himself in not allowing himself to be attracted by the pitfalls of polytheism, passions or impurity; he was honest with people in not injuring their honour and in not causing enmity between one person and another by slander and backbiting; he was honest with money which was put in his charge to be kept in his custody or to trade with, for he did not steal, deceive or cheat. He was honest in his speech, and he did not lie or exaggerate. He was honest with secrets and did not dissimulate or divulge. He was The Honest One.

And all the people of the tribe of Quraysh concurred in this: when they were rebuilding the Ka'ba they came to the point where they had to raise the black stone to set it in its place, and each wanted to have the honour: they drew swords and battle was about to start, when they agreed to accept the arbitration of the first man to enter the precinct, and they all shouted with joy when they saw Muḥammad coming, 'Here is the Honest One!' Honesty was well-known in him, then and throughout his life. In later years he said, 'There is no faith in one who has no honesty'.

When the verse, *"Warn your nearest kinsfolk"* was revealed to him, he began to preach openly. He went up onto al-Ṣāfā hill and cried, 'People of the Quraysh!', so they said among themselves, 'Muḥammad is crying out on al-Ṣāfā!' They assembled there and said to him, 'What is the matter?' He asked them, 'If I told you that some advancing army on horses is at the foot of the mountain coming to attack you, would you believe me?' They answered, 'Yes, you are not an untrustworthy person, and we have never known you to be a liar'. So he said, 'I bring you warning of a terrible chastisement [on the Day of Judgement]'. And then he called each clan by name, 'O clan of ʿAbd al-Muṭṭalib, and ʿAbd Manāf, and of Zuhrah', and so on until he had named all the clans

of the Quraysh, and then he said, 'God ordered me to warn my nearest kinsfolk, and I can bring you no benefit in this world or in the world to come unless you admit that there is no god but God'.

As the Messenger of God asked for a vote of confidence for the Quraysh by raising the banner of his honesty in their faces, he was fully confident that his life was so pure that there could be nothing impure in it to reverse their opinion. His life was of unchangeable innocence and purity and he was thus able to challenge them openly by declaring frankly that his life proved the truth of all he said.

Had the Meccans around him been truthful and sincere he would not have needed to issue this challenge: it would have been sufficient for him simply to tell them that he was the Messenger of God and they would have accepted it. Many in fact did believe simply because he told them, and they did so owing to their wealth of experience of his veracity and sincerity both towards themselves and towards others. Khadījah believed and Abū Bakr believed, and so did Waraqah and others. They believed him immediately he told them, because of what they knew of him and his life. Abū Sufyān, at a time when he was at his most bitter enmity with the Messenger of God conceded his honesty in his interview with Heraclius:

> 'Heraclius asked him, "Did you ever suspect him of lying before he said he was a Prophet?" Abū Sufyān said, "No", and Heraclius concluded, "I would say that he would not have shunned lying before people if he was prepared to lie before God". Then he asked him whether Muḥammad had ever been known to be treacherous and Abū Sufyān answered, "No". So Heraclius said, "I asked you whether he was treacherous and you answered "No", and such are the messengers of God – they are not treacherous".'

The story of this interview is narrated in the books of Aḥādīth and in biographies of the Prophet, and it is worth reflection because it is the conclusion of a wise person and shows the logic of a thoughtful man, and we shall take from it here the relevant part about the life of the Prophet and leave the other part, which deals with his mission, until later:

> 'Heraclius said to Abū Sufyān, "I asked you about his lineage, and you

said that he was of high descent, and such are messengers: they are from the noble stock of their people. And I asked you whether anyone before him had said as he had and you said No; and I reflected that if someone had said it before him I would have said, 'This is a person who is saying something in imitation of someone before him'; I asked you whether any of his ancestors were kings and you said No; and I said I thought, had any of them been king I would have said, 'This is a man who is trying to restore the kingdom of his ancestors"'.'

If we study the life of the blessed Prophet from the point of view of heredity or psychological development, we find that it proves his complete sincerity. His life was a complete illustration and fulfilment of what the Arab historian, ibn Khaldūn, said were the signs of prophethood and which people of intelligence and penetrating insight would confirm. One of these signs is that before their mission prophets should be endowed with goodness and intelligence and avoid all that is reprehensible and any kind of impurity – such is the meaning of their being 'under divine protection', as if they had been created to transcend all that is blameworthy in life as if it were in opposition to their very nature.

Ibn Khaldūn goes on to give some examples from the life of the Prophet in explanation of this principle:

'There is a trustworthy Ḥadith that while he was a boy the Prophet helped his uncle, al-ʿAbbās, to carry some stones for building the Ka'ba. He collected them in the apron of his gathered-up robe and became uncovered; at once he fell down in a faint, which caused him to become covered up again. He was once invited to a wedding banquet with all its attendant diversions and frolics, but sleep overpowered him until the sun rose, so that he neither saw nor took part in any of the activities. By his nature he instinctively avoided food which had an offensive smell such as onions and garlic, and when questioned about this he said, "I commune with such beings as you do not commune with".'

One of the subtle observations to which ibn Khaldūn draws our attention is his reference to the circumstances and atmosphere in which the blessed Prophet lived, and his life before and after the mission, remarking that it was all holy and virtuous, whether in his personal behaviour or in his relationship with the Angel of Revelation. Ibn Khaldūn adds:

'Consider this: when the Prophet told Khadījah about the Angel, she wanted at once to test him and said, "Let me come in between you and your mantle", and he allowed her to do so: at which the experience of revelation ceased and she said, "It must be an angel and not a devil", meaning that the Angel would not have approached a woman embraced by her husband. She also asked the prophet about the clothes he most liked to wear when the Angel came to him and he said, "White and green", meaning that white and green are colours of goodness and Angels, while black is the shade of evil and devils – and vast is the difference.'

This approach that we have followed in our discussion, and which was followed by ibn Khaldūn and by Heraclius before him, is that of primordial nature and of reason and it is likewise that approach followed by the Qur'ān. Primarily it is the approach of primordial truth: that is why when the Prophet suddenly confronted Khadījah with news of the revelation and when he said to her, "I fear for myself", she replied, "No, by God, God would not shame you, since you are faithful to the bonds of your kinsfolk, and you shoulder the burdens of those in difficulty; you give to those in need and extend hospitality to guests, and help others to bear calamities suffered in the cause of truth". Herein we are following the approach of the Qur'ān, which shows that the life of the Prophet stands as reliable proof that he was truthful in all that he said, for he was, as addressed in the Qur'ān, . . . *of sublime moral stature*, while the Prophet said, 'I have been sent to bring to fulfilment noble qualities of character'. The moral aspect of his character was well-known to his people since they had known Muḥammad as they knew their sons and brothers, and nothing of his behaviour was unknown to them. It says in the Qur'ān:

> *Those to whom we gave the Scriptures recognize it* (this Revelation) *as they know their own son, yet some of them deliberately conceal the truth.(II, 146)*

The Qur'ān directs our attention to the fact that the blessed Prophet was unlettered:

> *Never have you read a book before this, nor have you ever transcribed one with your right hand. Had you done either of these the unbelievers might have doubted.* *(XXIX, 48)*

One notable point is that the Prophet had lived with his people

for forty years without revealing any message or his prophethood, and even when the years of his ambitious youth were over he did not issue any call or predict any leadership, rule or mission; only when he had reached the prime of his life did he begin to talk about God's choosing him to transmit the Message:

> *Had God so wished, I would not have recited the Qur'ān, nor would He have given you any knowledge of it. A whole lifetime I dwelt amongst you before it was revealed: will you not understand?* *(X, 16)*

The Qur'ān challenges the unbelievers' truth and sincerity, or, you may say, their honesty, by putting forward one simple command which it was not difficult for them to carry out:

> *Say: 'I give you but one admonition: stand up before God in pairs or singly and ponder whether your compatriot is truly mad. He is sent forth to warn you against a dreadful chastisement.* *(XXXIV, 46)*

Moreover, the Qur'ān challenges them with itself.

There is no doubt that every sincere person would, on listening to the Islamic call, agree with the Negus (the ruler of Ethiopia at the time of the Prophet) that what Muḥammad brought 'comes from the same source of light'. The Negus had an unshakable belief in Jesus, and when he heard a description by the Muslims who visited him of the call to Islam, he believed in Muḥammad as he believed in Jesus, accepting that he was truthful, deriving his call from God. The Negus said this when he heard Ja'far ibn Abi Ṭālib describe to him the Age of Barbarity compared with that of Islam, both of which he knew well, since he had lived through both these periods. All the information in the documents supports what Ja'far said about the Age of Barbarity, and the Qur'ān and Aḥādīth confirm his words about Islām. Ja'far said:

> 'O King, we were an uncivilized people, worshipping idols, eating corpses, committing abominations, breaking natural ties, treating neighbours badly, and our strong devoured our weak. Thus we remained until God sent us an apostle whose lineage, truth, trustworthiness and clemency we know. He summoned us to acknowledge God's unity and to worship Him and to renounce the stones and images which we and our fathers formerly worshipped. He commanded us to speak the truth, be faithful to our engagements, mindful of the ties of kinship and of the duty of being good neighbours,

and to refrain from crimes and bloodshed. He forbade us to commit abominations and to speak lies, to devour the property of orphans or to vilify chaste women. He commanded us to worship God alone and not to associate anything with Him, and He gave us orders about prayer, almsgiving and fasting. (At this point he enumerated the conditions of Islām to the Negus). We believed him to be speaking the truth and we had faith in him and followed him in all he had brought from God, and we worshipped God alone without associating anything with Him. We treated as forbidden what He forbade, and as lawful what He declared lawful.'

When the Negus heard this he was convinced that Muḥammad was speaking the truth and said the famous words quoted above.

As for Heraclius, al-Bukhārī tells us that when he questioned Abū Sufyān about the call to Islām the latter told him:

'"Muḥammad commands people to believe in God alone and to associate nothing with Him, and forbids them to worship idols and commands them to prayers, truth and chastity, and to keep the bonds of kinship". Heraclius said, "If what you tell me is the truth, then this man would possess the land under my very feet here. I knew that a prophet was due to come, but I did not know that he would be from amongst your people, for if I knew that I could reach him I would take the trouble to go and meet him, and if I were with him I would wash his feet".'

This approach, that of demonstrating the sincerity of a claim by the claim itself, which was followed by Heraclius and the Negus, is the approach which al-Ghazālī confirmed when he said:

'If you examine the Qur'ān and Aḥādīth attentively, you cannot but come to the realization that Muḥammad is in the highest rank of prophethood. You can confirm this by testing what he said about religious observances and their effect in purifying hearts, and how the Prophet was truthful in saying, "He who practises what he knows, God will cause him to inherit knowledge of what he did not know", and that "He who supports an unjust person, God will eventually give that person power over him", and, "If a man starts the day making his anxiety one thought only, that of piety, God will suffice him for all the anxieties of this world and the next." If you test this with one thousand or two thousand or three thousand persons you will receive this inevitable confirmation, after which you will have no doubt about his prophethood.'

In the opinion of al-Ghazālī, reflecting in the call to Islām is one of the principal means of proving the truthfulness of the blessed Prophet.

Ibn Khaldūn, the great sociological writer, followed this method of reasoning. He outlines in a general way many sound approaches to matters concerning prophethood. We quote here what he said in relation to proving the trustworthiness of a messenger by studying his mission, especially when this mission is, like Islām, pure goodness. He says:

> 'Another sign by which they can be recognized is the fact that they call on people to embrace religion and to worship God in the way of prayer, almsgiving and self-restraint. Khadījah, as well as Abū Bakr, took that conduct as proof of the Prophet's truthfulness. They did not need any further sign of his mission beyond good conduct, and according to a sound Ḥadīth, when Heraclius received the Prophet's letter in which he was asked to become a Muslim, he is said to have called such Qurayshites as could be found in his country, among whom were Abū Sufyān, and to have asked them about the Messenger's state of being (some of which has already been quoted above). One of the questions he asked concerned what the Prophet commended them to do. Abū Sufyān's reply was, "Prayer, almsgiving, keeping the bonds of kinship and self-restraint, and other matters". Heraclius' comment was, "If it is all really as you say, he *is* a prophet, and he will take possession of this very ground upon which I am standing".' ('Self-restraint' ('ʿafāf') has in this context the meaning of 'immunity from sin and error' ('iṣmah).)

It is worth noting that Heraclius considered that ''iṣmah' and the call to religion and divine worship were proofs of the genuineness of his prophethood, and did not require a miracle.

In fact, if we consider the contents of the mission of the Prophet, we find that it realizes in a most accurate way the goal which God had set in sending it down in the first place, that is, extending Mercy towards all mankind, for He had said to the Prophet:

> *We sent you only as a blessing for all beings.* *(XXI, 107)*

Mercy, which we will discuss more fully in a later chapter, is the principal characteristic of all Islamic teachings, whether they concern society or the individual; whether they deal with the intellectual, ethical or legal aspects of life. This mercy arises in all

spheres of human activity and in various ways. In society, for instance, it is manifest in justice and brotherhood. Islam tied society together with a strong bond, making it resemble a well-constructed building. The Prophet said, 'The believer in his relation to another believer is like one part of a building supporting another'. Society is like a living body which, when any one limb is happy or miserable, it makes the body happy as a whole or miserable as a whole. The Prophet also said, 'The believers in their friendliness and compassion and sympathy towards each other are like one body – if one limb hurts, all other members will respond with sleeplessness and fever'. This mutual support is the result of the prevailing justice which restrains the passions of uncontrolled people, restricts greed, and reduces excessive ones to a course of moderation.

Together with justice, brotherhood is the main quality that achieves this mutual support. Through their common goals and hopes the believers are co-operative brothers, as described in the Qur'ānic phrase:

The believers indeed are brothers. *(XLIX, 10)*

Mercy in the individual manifests itself in its best sense in the way he devotes himself to God, as described in the phrase:

To God belongs sincere religion. *(XXXIX, 3)*

This sincere religion is nothing other than the perfect worship of God alone, and where this religion is, the worshipper will think more about other people than himself and will be ready to give up things and spend his wealth for them and even sacrifice himself. He will gain every good quality and shun all evil. One in whom all this is manifest would prove a mercy wherever he went or lived. Moreover, he himself by such devotion would move under the protection and care of God, convinced that he and his family are safe. Any believer who is rendered so happy through the care of God and his guidance will therefore be steeped in God's Mercy. The ideal in which the Islamic teachings are exemplified is the Prophet, as ʿĀ'ishah, Mother of the Faithful,[21] said about him,

21 A title given to any wife of the Prophet.

'His moral character is the Qur'ān'.

The Qur'ān was mingled with the very flesh and blood of the Prophet, and the light of the Qur'ān gleamed in his soul and body; as he was completely immersed in the Islamic mission, so it merged with him, in such a way that it was the revealed Mercy, and he was Mercy given as a gift.

The first part of the declaration of faith, that is, the declaration of the Unity of God, was fully put into practice by the Prophet. The late Egyptian scholar, Shaykh al-Dijwī expressed this in the following precious words which describe some aspects of the declaration of the Unity of God by the Prophet of Unity:

> 'Whoever observes the state of the Prophet will find him steeped in the sea of the Unity of God - his fear of God and his self-scrutiny in this respect mingled with his flesh and blood in a way which we can never find in a man who is possessed by passions or surrounded by darkness. If you study his situation, you will find him always referring to God in everything (as prophets and messengers do). So whenever something fortunate occurred, he would say, "Praise be to God by whose Grace good things are completed"; and if something unfortunate happened to him, he would say, "Praise be to God in all circumstances"; if he wanted to decide about something he would say, "Lord, choose for me". If he was travelling in a campaign against people he would say, "Lord, by you I advance and assault"; and when he wanted to sleep he said, "Lord, in Your Name I lay my side down and in Your Name I raise it up"; and when he woke up he would say, "Praise be to God, Who brought us to life after having made us dead, and to Him we return". And when he put on a new garment he would say, "Praise be to God who provided me with that with which I adorn myself in my life"; and when he ate, he would say, "Praise be to God, Who gave us what we eat and drink and Who made us Muslims"; and when he drank, "Praise be to God Who made the water sweet and fresh by His Mercy and did not make it salty and bitter by our sins"; when he broke the fast he would say, "Praise be to God Who enabled me to fast and provided me with the food to break it". When he turned in his bed during the night he would say, "There is no god but God, the One, the Almighty: He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that lies between them. He is the Mighty, the Forgiving". And when he got up during the night he would say, "My Lord, forgive and be merciful and guide me to the straightest path"; and when he was afraid of his enemies he would say, "Our Lord, we put You at their throats and we

take refuge in You from their evil"; and then when he went out of his house he would say, "In the Name of God, I put my trust in God – there is no power and no strength save from God. I take refuge in You lest I go astray or lead others astray, from becoming humiliated or humiliating others, from being unjustly treated or treating others unjustly, from behaving foolishly and from others being foolish with me". And when he saw the new moon, he would say, "May you be the crescent of goodness and guidance! I believe in God who created you"; and when he raised his eyes to the sky he would say, "O You who turn hearts in diverse ways, make my heart firm in obeying You; and when he swore he would say, "I swear by the One in whose hand Muḥammad's soul lies"; and when the wind stormed he would say, "Lord, I ask You to give me the good of this wind and what is good in it and what goodness it was sent with, and I take refuge with You from its evil and from the evil in it and from that with which it was sent". Thus he was in all his affairs completely saturated in the practice of looking up to God and seeking His help and resorting to Him, considering that neither he nor anyone else had power or strength: that is why he always said when any anxiety came upon him, "The Creator is sufficient for me, not any of his creatures: the Provider is sufficient for me, not any of those provided for – it is He who suffices me. God is enough for me and He is the Best One to act for me".'

Declaring God's Unity, and its Connection with Moral Courage

Declaring God's Unity, therefore is the very first and foremost basis of moral courage, and it also the motive behind many virtues, indeed of all virtues. To establish moral virtue and to ensure its continuation, God revealed the causes that lead a person to be too cowardly to tell the truth and retreat from declaring what is right. These causes can be reduced to two. The first we may name as concern for livelihood or fear of poverty, but God has made it clear that everybody's provision has been alloted beforehand by Divine Decree, and it is fixed that what is for you will come to you and what belongs to another person will not come to you:

> *Heaven holds your sustenance and all that you are promised. I swear by the Lord of heaven and earth that this is true: as true as that you have speech.*
>
> *(II, 22–23)*

> *There is not a creature on the earth whose sustenance is not provided by God. He knows its dwelling and its resting place. All is recorded in a clearly laid-out Book.* *(XI, 6)*

Nevertheless, Islām urges people to work and to employ the natural causes at hand if they want results, informing them that Heaven does not rain gold or silver, for the Prophet said, 'It is better for any of you to take your rope and go to the mountain, collect wood, sell it and feed yourself and give some for charity than to ask people [for money]'. He also said, 'The higher hand is superior to the lower hand'. Yet sustenance is in the hand of God, and no tyrant or man of power can prevent it from reaching you. God prevails in His purpose, and He is the Powerful, Almighty and Overpowering.

The second cause that prevents people from being morally courageous is their fear of death, but this is in fact pointless, since God has specified the term of life for every creature. Even if people dwelt in lofty fortresses, those who were destined to be killed would go to the places where they are to die, nevertheless:

> *Where their hour is come, not for one moment shall they hold back, nor can they go before it.* *(VII, 34)*

So the terms of life and sustenance are in the hand of God. Every idea or opinion or even whisper within the soul that goes against this is against the declaration of the Unity of God. Consider this noble picture of moral courage which Qur'ānic teachings engendered in the soul of a Muslim, who confronted the Caliph Sulaymān ibn ʿAbd al-Malik and said to him:

> 'I will let my tongue be free to speak what other tongues are too mute to say, in fulfilment of the right which God enjoined upon us. Some men surrounded you and they chose unwisely for themselves and exhanged your world for their religion, and they bought your satisfaction with the anger of their Lord. They feared you at the expense of their fear of God, instead of fearing God in their dealings with you. They are at war with the Hereafter and at peace with this world, so do not trust them with that with which God entrusted you, for they showed no negligence in wasting the trust of God and in being tyrannical and humiliating the nation. You are responsible before God for what these people have committed, while they are not responsible for what you have committed, so do not make their world

good by spoiling your after-life, because in the eyes of God no person is more duped than he who forfeits his own after-life for the sake of making the lives of others good in this world'.

None of this could have been realized had the Unity of God not pervaded the whole being of the Prophet so that from him this went to other individuals in his community. One of the manifestations of moral courage is that which the Prophet pointed out: accepting the truth - for moral courage lies as much in accepting the truth as it does in telling the truth.

The Role of the Messenger in Society

And to teach them the Book and Wisdom and to purify them.

Now we may begin to draw an outline picture of the Muslim nation which God and His Prophet envisaged.

What is this picture? It is that of the Prophet's teaching in action. In brief, what is the goal on which all his efforts centred during his mission? God has outlined it in a number of Qur'ānic verses:

God has truly been gracious to the faithful in sending them a Messenger of their own to recite to them His signs and to purify them and to teach them the Book and Wisdom, though they have hitherto been in evident error.(LXII, 6)

We have revealed to you this Book so that, by the Will of their Lord, you may lead men from darkness to light; to the path of the Mighty, the Glorious One. (XIV, 1)

If we wish to sum up the ideal image of the Muslim nation according to the teaching of God and His Prophet, we may say that it is a working nation which has been purified with the aid of divine principles. The efforts of the Prophet were all directed towards leading this nation from darkness to light; from ignorance to knowledge, from foolishness to guidance, because:

He teaches them the Book and the Wisdom and purifies them.

To explain this we go to the first verse which God revealed in the Qur'ān, in which is implied the constitution of the Muslim nation. The first word of the Qur'ān to be revealed was 'Iqra' ('recite'). The first few verses given on that blessed night were:

> *Recite, in the Name of your Lord who created, created man from congealed blood. Recite: your Lord is the Most Bountiful One, Who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know.* *(XCVI, 1-5)*

These speak of 'reciting' twice, mention the idea of learning in different derivatives three times, and speak of the pen, which is an instrument of learning.

When the late Shaykh Muḥammad ʿAbduh made his commentary on these verses he said, 'You cannot have more decisive proof put in a more eloquent way of the virtues of reading, writing and knowledge than in the way that God began his Book and Revelation with these illustrious verses'.

Subsequently, the following verses were given:

> *Nūn. By the pen and what they write, . . .* *(LXVIII, 1)*

beginning with one of the letters of the alphabet (N), and swearing by the pen and by the act of writing. So the first oath of the Qur'ān was by the pen and what it writes.

The name of the Book that was revealed is 'Al-Qur'ān'. Al-Rāghib al-Aṣfahani said,

> 'Some scholars stated that it was called 'the Qur'ān' from among the Books of God, not because it gathered the fruit of other books, but because it gathered the fruits of all knowledge,[22] as stated by God in verses that describe the Qur'ān:
>
> *An explanation of all things.* *(XII, 111)*
>
> *A book which manifests the truth about all things.* *(VI, 89)*

The Qur'ān, by its very name, and by the first verses revealed of it, and by the first oath in it, directs man openly and by inference, to seek for knowledge: in reading, writing and the extension of knowledge. God says in the Qur'ān:

> *Among His servants, only those fear God who have knowledge.(XXXV, 28)*

Fear of God, which is the fruit of knowledge, is one of the most important bases for surrendering oneself to God. Hence the necessity for complete knowledge in Islām: it is a necessity and not

22 The fruit of all knowledge in Islamic thought is the primordial philosophy, which is the philosophy of divinity, and the beliefs that are built on it, and the morals and laws of the social system based on it. All this is explained in the Qur'ān.

a luxury, since it is one of the foundations of the religion itself, and hence fundamental to the Muslim character. Knowledge must be sought about God, the universe, man, the soul, and every noble aspect that lies within the scope of this word.

Al-Bukhārī, in his book of sound Aḥādīth, included a chapter called 'A Chapter on Knowledge', and divided into sections, one of them being 'Knowledge before Talking or Acting':

> 'Because God laid down, *Know, there is no god but God*, we begin with knowledge. Men of knowledge are the inheritors of the prophets; they inherit knowledge. Whoever has acquired it has gained a vast fortune, and whoever follows the path of seeking knowledge, God will make for him an easy path to Paradise.'

God has further stated:

> *No-one will grasp* [the meaning of similes in the Quar'ān] *except those who have knowledge.* *(XXIX, 43)*
>
> *They will say, 'If only we had listened and understood, we would not now be among the tenants of Hell'.* *(XXIX, 43)*
>
> *Are those who know and those who do not know equal?* *(XXXIX, 9)*

The Prophet said, 'When God intends good for a person He makes him well-versed in the religion . . .such knowledge comes from learning'. commenting on this, Abu Dharr, a companion of the Prophet, said, 'If you were to place a sword on my neck and I thought I were able to carry out one of the blessed Prophet's teachings before you executed me, I would carry out the one to seek knowledge. Further, ibn ʿAbbās said that the explanation of the words, 'Be God-orientated' was, 'Be forbearing and knowledgeable'. It is narrated in a tradition told by ibn Masʿūd:

> 'The Prophet, may God's Blessing and Peace be upon him, said, "The only things that one should envy in other people are two: wealth which God has given to a man and enable him to spend in the cause of truth, and wisdom which God has given to a man so that he acts according to it and teaches it to other people".'

God has directed people's attention towards accepting His Oneness in various ways, some of which are only accessible to men of knowledge:

> *Say, 'Praise be to God and peace be upon His servants whom He has chosen! Who is more worthy, God or what they associate along with Him? Who made the heavens and the earth and sent down water from the sky, bringing forth gardens of delight, whose trees you could not have caused to grow? Another god apart from God? Yet they set up equals with Him. Who has established the earth and watered it with running rivers and set upon it firm mountains and placed a barrier between the two waters?*[23] *Another god apart from God? Yet most of them are ignorant. Who answers the oppressed when he cries out to Him, and relieves his affliction, and gives you the earth to inherit? Another god apart from God? How little do you reflect! Who guides you in the darkness of land and sea and sends winds as harbingers of His Mercy? Another god apart from God? Exalted be He above those things which they place along with Him! Who originates creatures, and who will bring them back to life* [in the hereafter]? *Who gives you sustenance from earth and sky? Another god apart from God? Bring your proof if what you say be true'. (XXVII, 59–64)*

God points out after this that however extensive the understanding of knowledgeable people may become, much remains unknown, and only He knows it. This implies that knowledge has no fixed end and that discovering the unknown is a mission which cannot end as long as the earth and heavens remain. So he said:

> *Say, 'No-one in the earth or the heavens has knowledge of what is hidden except God, nor do men know when they will be raised to life'.(XXVII, 65)*

Because of this testimony to the Unity of God and in the hope of enabling each person to reach whatever rank of spiritual development he is capable of attaining, Islām urges people to acquire learning and has made it one of the principles of the religion itself. It urges them on in inimitably striking ways. The Qur'ānic verses and the sayings of the Prophet which encourage all Muslims to attain knowledge are numerous and extensive, and if

> *Men of knowledge bear witness to the Unity of God with Him and with His Angels, (III, 18)*

then their status is indeed exalted:

> *God raises to high ranks those that have faith and those who have knowledge among you. (LVIII, 11)*

Because of these aspects of the faculty of knowledge and men of

23 Salt and fresh.

knowledge, God ordered his Prophet, who is the leader and example of the Muslims, to say:

> *My Lord, increase me in knowledge!* *(XX, 114)*

'My Lord, increase me in knowledge every day, at every moment!' should be the motto of the Muslim. The more fear of God a Muslim has, the more surrendering himself to God will ensue within him and in a more and more complete and satisfying way.

Finally, we come back to one of the observations that should always be kept in mind, which is that the first word revealed to the Prophet, announcing a new era of light, was 'Recite!'

The other aspect of the role of prophet in Society, which completes the picture of the Muslim nation as God and His Messenger wished it to be, is purification.

Purification begins with sincerity; sincerity in worshipping God alone and in all good works. The Prophet said: 'It is the intention that counts in actions and everyone will get what he intends: so he who migrated for the sake of God and His Messenger, his emigration will be for God and His Messenger, and he who migrated for mere wordly gain, or a woman to marry, his migration will be for that'.

> *We have revealed to you the Book with the truth: therefore worship God exclusively - to Him alone is true worship due.* *(XXXIV, 2-3)*
>
> *Say: 'I am bidden to serve God and to worship none beside Him'.* *(XXXIX, 11)*

There must be single-mindedness in worship, for God will not accept any service except that which is for His sake alone. When one stands before God in prayer or when one engages in any other religious service, one's frame of mind should be:

> *I have turned myself to Him Who created the heavens and the earth, a man of pure faith; I am not of the idolators.* *(VI, 79)*

God truly wished each of us to take His Prophet as a leader and an example:

> *There is a good example in the Messenger of God for those who look to God and the Last Day and remember God much.* *(XXXII, 21)*

The Prophet was a beacon that illuminated the Islamic approach of man to his Lord, which is:

> *Say: 'My prayers and my devotions, my life and my death, are all for God, Lord of all beings: He has no peer. Thus I am commanded, being the first of the Muslims'.* *(VI, 162)*

Anas ibn Mālik narrated that the Messenger of God said, 'Whoever parts with the world, having worshipped God alone and having performed his prayer and paid the alms-tax, he will leave it with God being pleased with him'.

Muʿāth ibn Jabal, on being sent to the Yemen, asked the Prophet, 'Give me counsel', and the Prophet replied, 'Make your religion exclusively for God, and little work will suffice you'. Al-Bayḥaqī narrated that the Prophet was asked, 'What is faith?' and he replied, 'It is sincere worship given to God alone'. Muslim narrates on the authority of Abū Hurayra that the Prophet said, 'God does not look at your bodies or your form, but into your hearts'. If a man deviates from worshipping God exclusively he should be reminded of the Prophet's saying, 'God says, "I am above anything that is added with Me. Any person who adds another beside Me will be linked exclusively with it instead". O people! Act exclusively for God, because God will not accept any other acts. Do not say, "I am doing this for God and because of my kinsfolk", otherwise it would be for the sake of kinship only, and in no way would it be for God. Do not say, "I am doing this for God and for your sakes", because it would then be for their sakes and in no way for the glory of God'.

The Way to make one's Religion Exclusively for God

Abū Saʿīd al-Kharrāz explained the basis of this in the realm of faith:

> 'The incumbent duty is to believe in God and to know, acknowledge and bear witness that there is no god but Him Alone, without an Associate, that He is the First and the Last, the Outer and the Inner, the Creator and the Initiator and the Shaper and Provider, He Who gives life and He Who takes it away, and to whom all affairs return; and to believe that Muḥammad is His servant and messenger and that he brought men truth from the source of truth, and that all the Prophets are to be believed and that they delivered their message in truth, and that they meticulously carried out their own precepts, and that Paradise is true, Resurrection is true, and the return is to God

Almighty; that He will forgive whomsoever he wishes and punish whomsoever He wishes; and that all this should be made clear upon your tongues free from doubt and uncertainty, and that it should dwell in your hearts, which must be serenely certain of all that you have affirmed. Nor let yourself be assailed by doubts about what comes from God on the tongue of his Prophet, and do not depart from the practice of the Prophet, his companions, the religious leaders who are good examples to the community, or with those who came after them as the religious leaders of later ages. You should follow the community of the faithful, in all sincerity, for God alone, desiring only to please God, so that your resignation and faith and affirmation of His Unity may be perfect'.[24]

Abū Sa'īd quotes the Qur'ānic verse:

> *Let him who hopes to meet his Lord do what is right and worship none beside Him.* *(XVIII, 110)*

Then he says,

'One of the meanings of this is that the worshipper should seek to please God in all his deeds, his acts and his movements in their outward and inward aspects, not wanting anything but God alone, standing on guard with his intellect and knowledge over his soul and heart, being watchful of his purpose, aiming at God in all his affairs; not loving anybody's applause and not rejoicing in his good deeds if they were seen by his fellow creatures. If something like this should happen to him, he should guard himself quickly against it, being detached from it and hating it and not acquiescing in it. But if anybody praises him he should praise God for showing his Grace to him in endowing him with a good quality which people see in him. Then he should fear his bad deeds and secret thoughts which are concealed from people but not from God, and this should make him anxious. He should fear lest his secret thoughts be worse than his outer life, because there is a Ḥadīth which says that if the secret thoughts are worse than outer behaviour, this is iniquity; if they are the same, this is justice; and if the secret thoughts are better than the outer behaviour, this is excellence'.[25]

Abū Sa'īd gives further elucidation by saying:

'It can also be said that a person should hope only for God, fear only

24 *Kitāb al-Sidq*, 17. See also Arberry's translation, *The Book of Truthfulness*.
25 ibid., 18–19.

> God and adorn himself only to please God; nor should he be affected by the blame of any blamers, nor take to heart their anger, provided he has followed the course wherein the love of God and His good pleasure lies. What remains to be said about the ultimate perfection of sincerity is greater, but what we have said will serve nonetheless as guidance for those disciples who are travelling on the Path'.[26]

We can see, then, that there must be faith, and that there must be sincerity in faith, vested in God.

The Way of Sincerity in Faith

The first brick in the palace of sincerity and the first tree to be planted in its garden is repentance, total and sincere repentance, and these are some of the conditions which the religious leader, al-Nawawī, explains in his beautiful book, *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn (Meadows of the Upright)*:

> 'Scholars have said that repentance for every sin is incumbent. If disobedience exists between you and God but has nothing to do with the rights of another person, then there are three conditions: first, to give up the act of disobedience; second, to regret having done it, and third, to resolve never to do it again. Failure to satisfy one of these three conditions invalidates the repentance, but if it should concern another human being, then there are four conditions. In addition to the three already mentioned he must discharge the debt due to that person. In the case of a payment of money due he should return it to him; if it were slander he should enable that person to execute the penalty or ask his forgiveness; and if it were backbiting he should ask his forgiveness. For a person must repent of all his sins; if he repents only of some of them his repentance will be valid only for them, while for the rest it would still be due. Proofs from the Qur'ān and from the Aḥādīth, and the consensus of the Islamic nation have all concurred that repentance is incumbent upon a Muslim'.[27]

But now that we are considering sincerity, the type of repentance which we look for in this context is general and all-embracing. God and His Messenger also urged us to repent in many tender and beautiful ways. In a Holy Utterance, God Almighty says, 'My servants, you make mistakes by day and night and I forgive all sins: ask my forgiveness and I will forgive you'.

26 ibid., 20.

27 *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn*, chapter on repentance.

Muslim narrates that the Prophet said,

> 'God is more pleased with the repentance of his servant than one of you maybe who, riding his she-camel through the desert, sees it run away from him, carrying his food and drink, and despairs of its return. Then he comes to a tree and lies in its shade in despair and while he is there it returns and he sees it standing beside him and he takes its halter and says, stumbling in his words through excess of joy, "Lord, you are my servant and I am your God".'

Muslim narrates on the authority of Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī that the Prophet said:

> 'God the All-Highest extends his hand by night so that people who have sinned in the day may repent, and he extends his hand by day so that those who have sinned by night may repent, until the sun rises from the west [until the end of the world]'.

Truly God has made repentance compulsory by saying:

> *Believers, turn, all of you, to God in repentance, that you may prosper.* *(XXXIV, 31)*
>
> *Believers, turn to God in true repentance!* *(LXVI, 8)*

In addition to this God says, encouraging and engendering hope in his Mercy:

> *Say, 'Servants of God, you who have sinned against your souls, do not despair of God's Mercy, for He forgives all sins: He is the Forgiving One, the Merciful.* *(XXXIX, 53)*

Then He immediately shows the way to this in an awe-inspiring and imposing picture, saying:

> *Turn in repentance to your Lord and surrender yourselves to Him before punishment overtakes you: for then there will be no-one to help you. Follow the best of what is revealed to you from your Lord before His punishment overtakes you in your heedlessness while you are unaware; lest any man should say: 'Alas, that I neglected my duty to God and scoffed at his Revelation', or, 'If God had guided me I would have been a righteous man', or when he sees his punishment, 'Could I but live again, I would lead a righteous life'* [for God will say to him,] *'My revelation came to you but you denied it. You were arrogant and had no faith at all'. On the Day of Resurrection you shall see those who uttered falsehoods about God with faces blackened. Is there not in Hell a home for the arrogant?* *(XXXIX, 54-60)*

Then God completes these verses by explaining the end of the God-fearing, and saying:

> *God will deliver those who fear Him, for they have earned Heaven. No harm shall touch them, nor shall they ever grieve.* *(XXXIX, 61)*

When repentance is completely genuine it entails acting according to the orders of God, refraining from what He forbids and following the way of God, observing his words:

> *Righteousness does not consist in whether you face towards the East or the West. The righteous man is he who believes in God and the Last Day and the Angels and the Scriptures and the Prophets; and who, although he loves his wealth, gives it to his kinsfolk, to the orphans, to the needy, to the wayfarers and to the beggars and for the redemption of captives; and who attends to his prayers and pays the alms-tax; and who is true to his promises and steadfast in trial and adversity and in times of war, such are the true believers; such are the God-fearing.* *(II, 177)*

The repentant person would also respond to this call of God:

> *God enjoins justice, doing good and giving to kinsmen and forbids indecency, wickedness and oppression. He admonishes you so that you may take heed.* *(XVI, 19)*

Complete and sincere repentance further entails that the person should have the moral qualities which God loves in his true servants. By reaching this state he will reach purification and success:

> *Successful are those who purify their souls.* *(XCI, 9)*

And this will bring him to the station of iḥsān, which the Prophet explained as 'worshipping God as if you see Him, for if you cannot see Him, nonetheless He sees you'. When a person reaches this stage he will attain to the love of God:

> *Verily God loves those who act with iḥsān.*

We have tried to give here a picture of the people who follow Islām according to the ideal set down by God and His Prophet: a people enlightened and purified; such is the ideal to which the

Prophet dedicated his life, until he had fulfilled it to the extent which pleased God, for he had been sent:

To teach them the Book, and Wisdom, and to purify them.

IV. THE ANGELS

Belief in Angels is an essential part of faith. The Prophet was sitting once in the company of some people when Gabriel came to him and said, 'What is faith?' The Prophet replied, 'Faith is believing in God and His Angels, in meeting with Him and His Messengers, and in the Resurrection'.[28]

The Holy Qur'ān speaks about Angels in many of its verses and chapters:

> *Those who say, 'Our Lord is God', then take the right path, the Angels will descend upon them, saying, 'Fear not, neither sorrow; rejoice in the Paradise you have been promised. We are your protecting friends in this world and in the one to come. Therein shall you have all that your souls desire and all that you can ask for'.* (XLI, 30-31)

In this respect al-Ghazālī says from personal experience, in his book, *al-Munqid min al-Ḍalāl (Deliverance from Error)*:

> 'From the outset of the Path [the Ṣūfī path of spiritual development] contact and vision begin, so much so that they [those on the path] will behold, even when they are awake, the Angels and souls of the Prophets and hear their voices and derive benefits from them'.

If the Angels descend upon the believers, how much more must they descend on Prophets and Messengers, bringing good tidings, keeping them company and supporting them: we know that the Messenger of God indeed saw Gabriel during his waking hours, and it is well-known that he used to commune with Angels. For

28 Reported by Abū Hurayra and recorded by al-Bukhārī.

that reason he abstained from eating foods with an offensive smell, such as onions and garlic; wherefore, as already mentioned above, ibn Khaldūn said that when questioned about this the blessed Prophet replied, 'I commune with such that you do not commune with'.

And we have already mentioned how the Prophet's wife, Khadījah sought to understand what the Prophet was experiencing, when he told her that the Angel used to come to him, and to ascertain whether it was truly an Angel.

What is the place of Angels in the hierarchy of creation? What is certain is that they were created before Adam, since God ordered them to bow down before Adam as soon as He had created him, although one rebel Angel, Iblīs, refused to do so because Adam had been made of 'clay and water'. Someone may ask, then, 'What is the physical nature of angels and what do they do?'

As to their physical nature, Muslim records, on the authority of ʿĀ'ishah that the Messenger of God said, 'The Angels were created from light'. As to their work, God set different functions for them to perform, by His permission. Some of them bear the Divine Throne. It is revealing to note that in addition to their function, the Bearers of the Throne never cease to glorify their Lord and believe in Him, that is, their faith in Him increases all the time on account of their unending glorification. There is no doubt that repetition of the Name of God, whether by Angels or human beings, has been made by God a means of increasing faith and exalting it. The Bearers of the Throne pray for human believers, as described in this verse:

> *Those who bear the throne and those who are round about it proclaim the praise of their Lord and believe in Him. They implore forgiveness for the faithful, saying, 'Our Lord, Your Mercy and Your Knowledge embrace everything. Forgive those who repent and follow Your path and guard them against the chastisement of Hell. Admit them, O Lord, to the Gardens of Eden which You have promised them, together with all the righteous among their fathers, their wives and their descendants. You are the Almighty, the All-Wise. Deliver them from evil. Whomsoever You deliver from evil, on him have You shown Mercy, and that is the mighty triumph.* (XLI, 7–9)

When a person arranges his life in such a way that it does not

stop him from remembering God and praying for believers, then he is like a Bearer of the Throne. The story was, after all, put in the Qur'ān as an example to be followed.

Furthermore, God has given the Angels various other functions. There is no doubt that in every movement they act upon His permission. Al-Bukhārī reports on the authority of ibn ʿAbbās that the blessed Messenger once said to Gabriel, 'Why do you not visit us more often?' Whereupon God revealed the verse:

> *We do not descend save at the bidding of your Lord, to Whom belongs what is before us and behind us, and all that lies between: and your Lord is not forgetful.* *(XIX, 64)*

Angels are sent down to Prophets to bring the Revelations from God, Who speaks in the Qur'ān as follows:

> *The Faithful Spirit brought it down into your heart* *(XXVI, 193)*

When the Prophet first experienced the Revelation and his wife Khadījah took him along to her cousin, Waraqa ibn Naufal (who during the Pre-Islamic period became a Christian and used to write the Gospel in Hebrew), he asked him what he had seen and then told him, 'This is the same one [Angel] whom God sent to Moses'.

Angels are also sent down to bring good news:

> *When Zachariah prayed to God to grant him good descendants the Angels called to him while he was standing in the sanctuary at worship, 'God gives you good tidings of John, who shall confirm a Word of God: honourable, chaste, and a righteous Prophet.* *(III, 28)*

The Angels also came to Mary and said:

> *God gives you good tidings of a Word from Him: his name is the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary. He shall be noble in this world and in the next, near-stationed to God.* *(III, 44)*

In Paradise on the Day of Judgement the Angels will receive the righteous servants of God whom He has graced, saying to them:

This is your day which you were promised. *(XXI, 103)*

God has told us that He sometimes sends them down to bring victory to believers in times of war. At the battle of Badr he commanded the Angels:

I am with you, give courage to the believers. *(VIII, 12)*

And sometimes He sends them as reinforcement, as he did at the same battle:

God gave you victory at Badr when you were helpless: therefore have fear of Him so that you may be faithful. You said to the believers, 'Is it not enough that your Lord should send down three thousand Angels as reinforcement? Yes, if you are patient and God-fearing and the foe comes against you, all of a sudden your Lord will send to your aid five thousand Angels clearly distinguished. *(III, 123–5)*

The reader will no doubt have observed that amongst the prerequisites laid down by God for sending down Angels are patience and fear of God.

One of the fascinating stories narrated in the Sīrah[29] books about the activities of the Angels is the following:

'On the night Ḥanẓalah ibn Abī ʿĀmir wedded, he heard the call for the battle of Uḥud, so he responded immediately and went to war, where he displayed great valour, until he was suddenly struck by a fatal arrow. When the battle was over the blessed Prophet said, "I saw Ḥanẓalah ibn Abī ʿĀmir being washed by the Angels with rain-water in silver basins between the heaven and the earth". Some Companions went to examine his body, where it lay amongst the dead, and found his hair dripping with water. They informed the Prophet, and he commanded, "Go and ask his wife about him", which they did. She told them that when he heard the call to battle he had gone out, having consummated the marriage with her, though without having time for the ritual ablutions. The Companions reported this to the Prophet, who said, 'For that reason the Angels were bathing him'.

29 Accounts of the Prophet's life.

Angels have beautiful roles to perform, as we can see from this Ḥadīth narrated by Abū Ḥurayrah in which the Prophet said:

> 'When God loves a person he will call to Gabriel, saying, "God loves this person, so you love him as well". Gabriel will love him and in his turn will announce to the inhabitants of heaven, "God loves this person, so you love him also". They will love him and then he will gain acceptance among his fellow-beings on earth'.

We cannot omit the following story which is narrated by al-Bukhārī and others:

> ' ʿĀ'ishah asked the Prophet, "Did you ever have a harder day than that of the battle of Uḥud?"[30] So he began to tell her what he had experienced at the hand of her people while he was calling them to the religion, thus explaining that the hardest day of all was at al-ʿAqabah, when he invited ʿAbd Yālīl to embrace Islām and support the Prophet in proclaiming the mission and carrying it out, but he refused and sent him away with mockery and harshness. The Prophet continued, "So I set off, preoccupied with my troubles, and by the time I became aware of myself I was already at Qurb al-Thaʿālib, which is one day's walking distance away from Mecca. I raised my head and there I saw a cloud shading me. I looked and saw Gabriel in it. He called me, saying, "God has heard what your people said to you and how they answered you, and he has sent to you the Angel of the mountains: command of him what you will". Then the Angel of the mountains greeted him and said, "God has sent me, Muḥammad, for He has heard what your people said to you. Your Lord has sent me so you may command of me what you desire. If you wish I will tumble down on them the two mountains al-Akhshabain (overlooking Mecca)". The Messenger said, "I hope that God will bring forth from their loins those who will worship Him, not associating anything with Him".'

Note the Mercy of the Prophet in his answer to the Angel. In other situations like this he used to say, 'Lord, forgive my people, for they do not know'. He is, indeed, as God addressed him in the Qur'ān:

We sent you only as Mercy to all mankind *(XVII, 107)*

and it substantiates the saying of the Prophet, 'I am Mercy, given as a gift'.

30 A battle which the Muslims lost through some of them having unwittingly disregarded the orders of the Prophet.

V. THE RESURRECTION

God, Glory be to Him and High be He, is the Creator. He is One, Omniscient, Omnipotent.

He is also the Raiser of the Dead.

The Ressurection is an issue which has been denied by some people whom al-Ghazālī called 'the naturalists' who, although believing in the Creator because of the wonders they could see in nature, with its perfect order which cannot be the result of chance, considered that the soul follows the body and that it would therefore disintegrate with the body's disintegration. Consequently they could not believe in the Hereafter, Judgement, Paradise and Hell. In more than one place the Qur'ān answers the various arguments of such people, and of others coming from different places and using different approaches to the same denial. The naturalists amongst the Arabs at the time of the coming of the Qur'ān did not use philosophical logic - they only denied the Resurrection and considered it too incredible to be possible.

> *'What?' they say, 'when we are bones and broken bits, shall we be raised up as a new creation?'* *(XVII, 49)*

> *'Who will bring life to rotten bones?'* *(XXXVI, 79)*

The Qur'ān answers them by reminding them of the manifestations of the power and justice of God which prevails throughout the universe:

> *Does man think that he would be left to live in vain? Was he not a drop of ejected semen? Then did he not become a blob of coagulated blood, then did not God form and mould it, making of that male and female? Is he then not able to raise the dead to life?* *(LXXV, 36-40)*

There are many verses in the Qur'ān which answer their denial and which are based on the manifestation of God's power and justice. In the following verses there are various answers, all clear and strong. We will quote the verses, and also the commentaries made on them by al-Kindī, the philosopher:

> *Man says, 'Who will give life to rotten bones?' Say, 'He who created them first will give them life again and He has knowledge of all His creation. He has created for you fire from the green tree and behold, you kindle from it. Is He who created the heavens and earth not able to create the like of them? He surely is. He is the All-Knowing Creator. His command when He desires a thing is to say to it, 'Be!' and it is. Glory be to Him in whose hand is the dominion of everything and it is to Him you return'. (XXXVI, 78–83)*

M. A. Abū Rīdah, in the *Rāsa'il-Kindī* says about the latter's commentary on these verses:

'Our philosopher sets out the theoretical principle inherent in these verses and also draws conclusions from them. These are:

(i) The return to existence of something after it has been created and has disintegrated is possible, as proved by seeing it actually happen, especially since collecting the scattered parts of something is easier than creating and originating that thing from non-existence – although there is nothing that we can term easier or harder for God. This proof exists in the verse:

> *Say, 'He who created them first will give them life again and he has knowledge of all His creation'.*

(ii) The emergence of something out of its opposite, like fire from a green tree, is possible, and it does actually happen, and can be perceived by the senses. It is possible, therefore, that life will pulsate again in a body that is disintegrated and lifeless, and this is also based on the greater principle which is that something can come into existence out of non-existence by the action of the true Creator. This proof exists in the verse:

> *'He created for you fire from the green tree and behold, you kindle from it.'*

Al-Ashʿarī used this proof to demonstrate that the Resurrection is possible.

(iii) The creation of man, or bringing him to life again after death is

easier than creating the universe when it was not there in the first instance, and this is the content of the next verse:

> *'Is He who created the heavens and earth not able to create the like of them? He surely is. He is the All-Knowing Creator.'*

(iv) Creation or any form of activity, however great the object created may be, does not require any substance or time on the part of God, the Originator. Herein lies a contrast with the activity of human beings, which takes time for fulfilment and requires a given substance that can be worked on. This is the meaning of the verse:

> *'His command, when He desires a thing is to say to it, "Be!" and it is'.*

In the opinion of al-Kindī, this verse should answer the denial in the heart of the unbelievers based on their supposition that the Divine activity manifested in the creation of the great universe needs a time proportionately great. The verse gives the decisive answer by explaining the nature of Divine activity, and that it is Creative Will and Absolute Power needing neither substance nor extent in time.

> 'Which man can bring together with human philosophy in a speech employing the number of letters in these verses what the Almighty has brought together and explained for His blessed Prophet: that bones will come to life again after having been decayed, and that His power creates heaven and earth and that something comes out of its opposite . . . the crafty tongues of the logicians are too weak to do this, and the utmost human capabilities would fall far short of this goal, and the limited human intellect is barred from such attainment.'[31]

We should not leave the subject of the Resurrection without directing the attention of the reader to the splendid parallel mentioned in the Qur'ān between the dead land to which God gives life so that it brings forth varieties of wonderful growth, and the broken bodies in which God renews life. Consider the striking image:

> *O people, if you are in doubt about the Resurrection* [remember that] *We created you from dust, then of a sperm drop, then from a blob of coagulated blood, and then from a lump of flesh, formed and unformed, so that We may*

31 *Rasā'il al-Kindi*, pp. 56–8.

make[things] *clear to you. We establish in the wombs what We will for an appointed term and then We bring you forth as infants that you may grow up and reach your prime. One dies young and another lives on to the vilest age so that he no longer knows what he used to know.* [Likewise] *you behold the earth, dry and barren, but no sooner do We send down rain upon it than it begins to stir and swell and put forth in pairs every kind of delightful growth. That is because God is Truth and He gives life to the dead and He has power over everything. The Hour* [of Doom] *is sure to come – in this there is no doubt, and God will raise to life those who are in their graves.(XXII, 5-6)*

The Qur'ān also describes in a captivating way what precedes and follows the Resurrection. Many verses describe the Resurrection and the Judgement, the weighing of deeds, the state of believers and unbelievers, Hell with its abominations and Paradise with its various scenes of delight and luxurious meadows. We will only quote here one example:

They do not measure God according to His true measure. But on the Day of Resurrection He will hold the entire earth in His grasp and the heavens will be rolled up in His right hand. Glory be to Him; exalted be He above what they associate with Him! The trumpet shall be sounded and all who are in Heaven and earth shall swoon, except those who shall be spared. Then the trumpet will be sounded again and they shall rise and gaze around them. The earth will shine with the light of her Lord and the Book shall be set in place, and Prophets and Witnesses shall be brought and judgement will be given justly between them and they will not be wronged. Every soul will be paid back in full for what it has wrought, for God knows all its actions well. Then the unbelievers shall be driven in droves to Hell: when they draw near, its gate will then be opened and its keepers will say to them, 'Did there not come to you Messengers of your own who recited to you the signs of your Lord and gave you fair warning of this Day?' 'Yes indeed', they will answer: but the decreed punishment against the unbelievers will be fulfilled and it shall be said, 'Enter the gates of Hell, to dwell therein for ever; evil is the dwelling-place of the arrogant'. But those who fear their Lord shall be led in bands to Paradise. When they draw near, its gate will be open and its keepers will say to them, 'Peace be upon you, you have been good men; enter in to dwell here for ever'. They will say, 'Praise be to God, Who has made good to us His promise and given us the earth to inherit, that we may dwell in Paradise wheresoever we please. How excellent is the reward of those who act rightly'. You shall see the Angels encircling the Throne proclaiming the praise of their Lord, and Judgement will be made between them fairly and it shall be said, 'Praise be to God, Lord of all worlds'. (XXXIX, 67-75)

VI. THE QUALITY OF MERCY IN ISLAM

My Lord is All-Merciful and All-Loving. *(XI, 30)*

We sent you only as a Mercy to all Worlds. *(XXI, 107)*

'You will not be true believers until you show Mercy.' (Ḥadīth)

The Prophet, as we have seen, defined faith as believing in God and His Messengers and Angels, in the Resurrection and in the final meeting with Him. In the previous chapters we have dealt with these pillars of the Islamic creed. Such a creed engenders great virtues and qualities which ensure the happiness of man in this world and in that to come. In this small book, however, we will touch only on two questions, dealing in this chapter with the quality of Mercy, and in the last chapter with examples of believers and unbelievers.

Now we shall talk about Mercy, which is one of the attributes of God and the distinguishing quality of the Prophet and all true believers.

One of the Names of God is 'al-Raḥmān' ('the All-Merciful'). The position of this Name among the Beautiful Names of God is such that it is sometimes ranked as equal to the Name of God Itself, 'Allāh'.

Say, 'call upon God (Allāh), or call upon the All-Merciful (al-Raḥmān): whichsoever you call upon, to Him belong the Names most Beautiful.

(XVII, 110)

Another Name of God is 'al-Rahīm' ('the All-Compassionate'), for God's Mercy is complete, universal and all-embracing. Al-Ghazālī explains total Mercy as that which overflows with goodness towards the needy, arising from the fact that God wills it in this way and takes perpetual care of them.

'God's Mercy is complete because He wishes to fulfil the needs of those in want and because He carries this out to the full, and it is overall because it includes the deserving and undeserving, and it incorporates in its provision luxuries as well as necessities. He is, indeed, the All-Merciful, the Compassionate, in the absolute sense.'

In addition to describing God as 'The Merciful', the Qur'ān talks about Him as 'Arḥam al-Rāḥimīn' ('The most Merciful of the merciful')[32] and 'Khair al-Rāḥimīn' ('The Best among the merciful')[33].

An example of this Divine Mercy is narrated by Muslim in the following Hadīth, where the Prophet transmits the Divine Utterance[34] about God, Who on the Day of Judgement will say to a man before Him,

' "O son of Adam, I was ill and you did not come to visit Me", so the man would reply, "Lord, how can I visit You when You are the Lord of all beings?" God would continue, "Do you not know that a servant of Mine whom you knew was ill and you did not visit him? Did you not know that, had you visited him, you would have found Me there with him? O son of Adam, I asked for food and you did not feed Me". The man would reply, "How can I feed You when You are the Lord of all beings?" God would continue, "Do you not know that My servant asked for food from you and you did not feed him? Had you fed him you would have found the reward of that with Me now. O son of Adam, I asked for drink and you did not give Me to drink". He would ask, "Lord, how can I give You to drink when You are the Lord of all beings?" God would reply, "My servant asked you for drink and you did not give him to drink. Do you not know that if you had given him to drink you would have been rewarded for that here with Me?" '

This Holy Utterance agrees with the sayings of the noble Prophet and the Qur'ānic verses:

It is He Who sends down saving rain when they have lost all hope, and spreads out His Mercy: He is the Protector and the Praiseworthy. *(XLII, 28)*

Our ancestors who reflected on this verse used to resort to God and turn to Him in hardship as their Protector and the only

32 *VII, 151.*
33 *XXI, 83.*
34 God's Words through the mouth of the Prophet that are not part of the Qur'ān. (See also f.n. 15.)

Praiseworthy One, finding in this the relieving coolness of contentment and a way out from the constriction of distress into the expanse of His Mercy. In all moments of life His Mercy is close to those who do good for His sake. It surrounds them and descends on them, leads them and follows them, in all spheres of life, and the first of the doers of good are Prophets and Messengers. The Qur'ān gives many examples of His Mercy towards them. It speaks of Noah:

> *And before him (Lot) Noah invoked Us, and We responded to his prayer and saved him and his kinsfolk from the great distress, and We delivered him from the people who denied Our signs. Evil men they were: We drowned them all.* (XXI, 76–77)

It speaks of Job and of the time when he called upon God, saying:

> *'Adversity has afflicted me and Thou are the most Merciful of the merciful.' We answered him and removed his affliction and restored to him his family and many more with them: a Mercy from Ourselves and a Reminder to the worshippers.* (XXI, 83–84)

And the Qur'ān speaks of Jonah:

> *Dhū al-Nūn, when he went away in anger, thought We had no power over him. But in the darkness he cried, 'There is no god but You, Glory be to You: I have done wrong'. We answered him and delivered him from grief. Thus We deliver the believers.* (XXI, 87–88)

Again, the Qur'ān speaks of

> *Zachariah when he invoked his Lord, saying, 'Lord, leave me not childless, though of all heirs You are the best'. We answered him and bestowed on him John and set his wife aright. They vied with each other in good works and called upon Us with yearning, and they were humble before Us.* (XXI, 89–90)

Then the Qur'ān speaks of others to whom He showed Mercy:

> *When Our Command came to pass we delivered Hūd and those who believed with him through Our Mercy.* (XI, 58)

> *When Our Command came to pass we delivered Ṣāleh and those who believed with him through Our Mercy.* (XI, 66)

> *When Our Command came to pass we delivered Shuʿayb and those who believed with him through Our Mercy.* (XI, 94)

His Mercy is indeed close to any man who does good:

> *Whoever does good, being believers, be they man or woman, We shall assuredly grant them a good life and recompense them according to the best of their deeds.* *(XVI, 97)*

God's Mercy is also close to those who fear Him. It relieves their distress, removes their sorrows and provides liberally for their needs.

> *And whoever fears God, He will arrange for him a way out and will provide for him from a source on which he little counted.* *(LXV, 2-3)*

God calls upon Man not to despair:

> *Who but those who have lost their way would despair of God's Mercy?* *(XV, 56)*

God holds it against Man that he is miserly and stingy:

> *Say, 'If you possessed the treasures of my Lord's Mercy you would have hoarded them for fear of expending them: Man is indeed very tight-fisted.* *(XVII, 100)*

When one looks around in the universe one finds the Divine Mercy pervading it:

> *In His Mercy He has given you night and day, for you to repose in and seek after His bounty, and so you may be thankful.* *(XXVIII, 73)*

> *One of His signs is that He gave you spouses from among yourselves, so that you may repose in each other, and He set between you love and mercy. Surely in this there are signs for thoughtful people.* *(XXX, 21)*

Divine Mercy observes laws, of which we give the following examples spoken by the Prophet:

'The Merciful One shows mercy to those who are merciful'.

'Be merciful to those on earth so that He in heaven may be merciful to you.'

'If you show mercy to a sheep, God will show mercy to you.'

'If a man engages himself with the needs of a brother (fellow-believer) God will engage Himself with that man's needs.'

'He who relieves the distress of a Muslim in this world, God will relieve him of his distresses on the Day of Judgement.'

'He who covers a Muslim, God will cover him on the Day of Judgement.'

'God will support a servant as long as he supports his brother.'

These are a few of the laws of Mercy given by Muḥammad.

So far we have talked about Mercy as one of the attributes of God as revealed in the Qur'ān and the sayings of the Prophet. We now deal with it as a quality of the Prophet himself. In the Qur'ān he is addressed: *We sent you as Mercy to all worlds.* God did not say he was Mercy sent to one particular country or even to mankind, but to all the world.

The Prophet speaks of his position in this world, saying, 'I am Mercy, given as a gift'. God shows mercy to mankind in the teachings He revealed to the Prophet, and in making him an example of the human conduct He wishes for believers.

It is related that the Prophet first encountered the Angel of Revelation in the cave of Mount Hīra, and this was the splendid beginning of the Islamic mission, which is opened by these verses:

> *Recite, in the Name of your Lord, Who created, created man from congealed blood; recite, and thy Lord is most bountiful, Who taught by the pen, taught man what he did not know.* *(XCVI, 1-5)*

The Prophet's wife, ʿĀ'ishah narrates that he returned with the inspiration, his heart thumping, and that he went to Khādijah and said, 'Cover me, cover me!' They covered him until his fear was over, then, as we have already mentioned above, he told her what had happened, saying, 'I fear for myself'. Khadījah replied, 'Never, by God! He will never disgrace you, for you maintain good relations with your kinsfolk, help others with their burden and give to the destitute. You show generosity to your guests and assist those deserving ones who have suffered calamity'.[35]

The good lady Khadījah knew the Prophet very well, first through reputation and then by her life with him. When he said to her, 'I fear for myself', she immediately answered without hesitation that God would not disgrace him, giving as her reason the number of qualities which can all be crystallized into one, which is Mercy. She realized by her pure insight one of the divine

35 Narrated by al-Bukhārī.

laws, which states that God's Mercy stays close to those who show mercy and that He will never disgrace a merciful person. She attributed to the Prophet the quality of Mercy before all else, saying, 'You keep good relations with your kinsfolk'.

In Islam the first position goes to the mother and father, whom God mentions many times in the Qur'ān immediately following the first principle of faith, the declaration of the Unity of God:

> *Your Lord has enjoined that you worship none but Him, and that you show kindness to your parents. If either of them attain old age with you, do not show impatience towards them, nor rebuke them, but speak to them with gentle words. Lower the wing of humility to them out of mercy and say, 'Lord, have mercy upon them, for they brought me up when I was a small child.*
>
> *(XVII, 23-24)*

In another place God contrasts two groups of people in the treatment of their parents and in their goodness and piety. In the case of the first group, God would accept the best of their deeds and overlook their sins:

> *We have enjoined Man to show kindness to his parents. With much pain his mother bore him and gave him birth. She bore him and weaned him during all of thirty months. When he grows to manhood and attains his fortieth year he says, 'Arouse me, O Lord, to give thanks for the favours You have bestowed on me and my parents, and to do good works that will please You, and grant me good descendants. To You I turn and to You I surrender myself'. Such are those from whom We will accept the best of their works and whose misdeeds We shall overlook. They are among the dwellers of Paradise. True is the promise that has been given to them.* *(XLVI, 15-16)*

As for the second group of His people, those who mistreat their parents, God describes them as the losers:

> *But he that speaks unkind words to his parents and says to them, 'Shame on you, do you warn me of the Resurrection, when all generations have passed away before me?' And when they pray for God's help and say, 'Woe to you, have faith, the promise of God is true', they reply, 'This is nothing but the fairy tales of the ancients'. Such men are those against whom has been realized the Word* [Fate] *of by-gone nations, of men and of jinn.*[36] *They indeed are the losers.* *(XLVI, 17-18)*

As to the sayings of the Prophet, many of them are concerned

36 Spirits.

with the bond of blood-relationship. There is, for instance, the famous Hadīth:

> 'When God had finished creating his creatures, the Bond of Kinship[37] said, "This is the time to take refuge in Thee from severance". So God replied, "Yes, does it not satisfy you that whoever keeps you joined, I will join him to Me, and whoever severs you, I will cut him off from Me?" She replied, "Yes, Lord, it will satisfy me", and He said, "Then it is granted". Then the Prophet said, "Read of your wish:
>
> > *Would you then, if you turn away, spread corruption in the land and sever your ties of kinship? Such are those whom God has cursed, making them deaf and blind".'* *(XLVII, 22–23)*

God shows the extent of the Mercy of the Prophet in His words:

> *There has come to you a Messenger of your own: grievous to him is your suffering. He is full of concern for you, gentle to the believers, and merciful.* *(IX, 128)*

The Qur'ān also records how eager he was to guide his nation and save them from the bad end of unbelievers:

> *You may destroy yourself with grief, sorrowing over them if they do not believe in this revelation.* *(XVIII, 6)*

Al-Rāzī, commenting on the verse, *We sent you only as Mercy to all Worlds,* remarks that the Prophet was a mercy in religious and worldly matters. He was Mercy in religion because he was sent when people were following ignorance, paganism and error. Even the people of the Book were in confusion about their religions, for a long period had elapsed since their foundation and there was no longer agreement amongst them about the varying interpretations of their Scriptures. God Sent Muḥammad at a time when a seeker after truth had no means of salvation or reward. So the Prophet called them to the truth and showed them the way to rewards, laying down legislation and distinguishing the lawful from the unlawful. If his concern is to seek the truth, and if he is truly guided, a person must derive benefit from this Mercy, so that he

37 In Arabic the word for 'Bond of Kinship' is the same word as that for 'womb'. This vividly suggests the physical link with the Origin, and that breaking kinship is an unnatural tearing away from its bond.

will not be imprisoned in imitation of others, nor in obstinacy and arrogance:

> *Say: 'To the believers it* [Qur'ān] *is guidance and a cure, but to those who believe not, in their ears is a heaviness and to them it is a blindness;* [as if] *they are being called from a far place'.* *(XLI, 44)*

He was Mercy in worldly matters because by him his people were saved from much humiliation and war, and were given victory by the blessing that he brought to them. Muslim recorded, on the authority of Abū Ḥurayra, that it was said to the Prophet, 'Pray that God's curse will fall on those who do not believe in One God', but he answered, 'I was not sent to curse, I was sent as Mercy'.

Al-Bukhārī told that the Prophet said, 'I was sent as Mercy and not as punishment'. He used to remind the Muslims of mercy whenever the occasion arose, and one day when they were returning from the battle of Dhāt al-Riqā'a, a man came with a fledgling and the parent bird came and flung itself at the man, and people were amazed. The Prophet seized the chance, as usual, to give them a lesson and remind them of God, so he said,

> 'Are you surprised at this bird? You took its baby and it flung itself at you out of compassion for its young one, and by God's name, your Lord is more compassionate towards you than this bird to its chick'.

And on another occasion the Prophet saw a woman pressing her child to her breast in obvious tenderness and deep love. The Prophet turned to his Companions and said, 'Can you imagine this woman throwing her child into the fire?' They said, 'In the Name of God, no, Messenger of God'. So he said, 'In Truth, God is more merciful to his servants than this woman to her child'.

A Bedouin once saw the Prophet kissing one of his grandsons and he exclaimed with surprise, 'Do you kiss your children? I have ten and never kissed one of them!' So the Prophet replied disapprovingly, 'God loves those in whose heart there is mercy'.

As already seen, the Prophet's compassion encompassed not only men, but animals as well. In the Sīrah books we read that he once passed by a garden that belonged to one of his followers.[38] He

38 The Muslims of al-Madīnah who helped the Prophet and received him and his followers when they migrated from Mecca are called the Anṣār (the Helpers).

entered it and saw a camel groaning, with tears flowing from its eyes, so he went to it and stroked it until it became calm. Then the Prophet asked who the owner was, and a young man came and said it was his. Then the Prophet said, 'Should you not fear God in this beast which God gave you to possess? You keep it hungry and make it labour'. So the man was ashamed and treated his camel better from that time onwards.

It was also narrated that the Prophet said, 'A woman went to Hell on account of a cat. She had tied her up without food or letting her free to catch the creeping things of the earth'.

It is also recorded that the Prophet passed a camel which was so thin that its belly stuck to its back, so he said, 'Fear God in these speechless beasts. Keep them well to ride and keep them well to eat'.

Abū Ḥurayra explained that he also said:

> 'A man came by a well and drank from it and at the well there was a panting dog,[39] so he showed compassion towards it by taking off one of his boots and filling it with water, giving it to the dog to drink. God rewarded him and admitted him to Paradise'.

On another occasion, the Prophet was urging people to be merciful and telling them the importance of this virtue in religion. One of his Companions said, 'We do show mercy to our wives, children and relatives'. The Prophet said, 'It is not this that I mean – I mean universal mercy'.

There is no doubt that mercy to wives and children and relatives is commendable, and the Prophet urged them to show it, but he wanted mercy to penetrate the core of the human being so that it became part of his nature, manifested in all his actions. This should be the mark of a Muslim.

39 Dogs are considered unclean in Islām.

VII. BELIEVERS AND UNBELIEVERS

At the beginning of this book we pointed out some characteristics of believers as described in the Qur'ān. In this section we shall give some of the characteristics of those who do not believe: the Qur'ān gives numerous and vivid examples of those who turn away from faith:

> *Tell them the story of the man to whom We gave Our signs, who sloughed them off, and Satan overtook him and he was led astray. Had it been Our will We would have exalted him by Our signs but he inclined towards the earth and followed his desires. He is like a dog which, if you chase it, will loll out its tongue, panting, and if you leave it alone it will still do the same. Such are those that deny Our signs. So tell them these stories so that they may take thought.* *(VII, 175-176)*

The signs of God surround man on all sides. Heavens and earth, trees and rivers, mountains, oceans, stars and galaxies, are all amongst His signs. This perfect creation embraces man wherever he may be and proclaims the glory and might of God: but some people try to slough them off, by not admitting His Divinity to the full. The phrase, 'slough them off' is a most fitting and perfect phrase here. They try to cast the signs off, when they are as close to them as their own skin and, moreover, they cast them off with their own efforts and against the state in which man was created, in a way that does not agree with the natural order of things. These people have taken themselves out of the ranks of those admitting God's Lordship. By removing themselves from the community of servants of God, they put themselves into the position of the followers of Satan, becoming an easy prey for him. In this way he

catches them out, with all his deviations, and leads them astray. Both those who are earthbound and those who follow their desires are like a dog which hangs out its tongue, panting whether chased or left alone. Such people who are so weighed down are always unsettled in life, however plentiful God's provision may be for them, because they do not hold on to a spiritual reality that makes them content. Material goods alone, however many a person may possess, cannot long satisfy someone who is greedy. As the Prophet said, 'If the son of Adam had a valley of gold, he would seek a second: if he had two, he would seek a third'. And when God holds back His provision from such a person he will naturally start panting.

Likewise, a person who follows his desires does not look to a reassuring Guide to make him content and he is therefore troubled, since his desires know no limits and his imagination has no idea or standard to restrain it.

In the Qur'ān the believers are warned against the ways of the unbelievers:

> *Do not obey the disbelievers – they desire that you should compromise, then they would compromise. Nor should you obey every mean swearer, or backbiter going about with slander, hinderer of good, or wicked transgressor, who is coarse, though claiming high ancestry. What is more, because he has wealth and children he says, when Our revelations are recited to him, 'These are but fables of the ancients'. On the nose We will brand him. (LXVIII, 8–16)*

These are some of the characteristics of non-believers, which may combine together in one person or be visible individually in each person according to the quality of his disbelief or his belief in false substitutes.

The Qur'ān follows this with a picture of another group of those who live at variance with true belief. This is both an old and a new story. We come across it in various ways in the works of by-gone people and we witness it similarly in the events of our own time. The story can be summarized as follows:

> 'A number of sons inherited from their father a luxurious garden with ripening fruits in it, like Paradise. When it was time to gather the harvest they resolved and swore that they would take it all for

themselves and not give any of it to the poor or needy. Satan and their own inclinations persuaded them that they deserved every fruit in the garden far more than the poor and needy, because they had big families with numerous dependants and they wanted to be sure of their future provision. They would therefore not let any of the fruit reach the hungry or needy. However, the most upright among them reminded the others that they should pay God's due on the harvest, but they scolded him, and his words did not meet with response in their ears or hearts. They made plans overnight, but God had other plans:

> *A visitation from God came down upon it* [the garden] *while they slept, and in the morning it was blackened.*

In the morning those who had made their plans at night called out to one another and went to the garden stealthily, whispering one to another, 'No beggar shall set foot today in our orchard'. Thus they went out, fixed in their resolve, but when they reached it they were at first confused. They thought that they had lost their way and gone to another orchard, but when they had confirmed it was theirs they were stunned. It was a hard lesson for them, and at that crucial moment they were prepared to return to God. The most upright amongst them reminded them, 'Did I not bid you praise God?' They said, 'Glory be to our Lord. We have assuredly done wrong', and began to blame one another. Reflecting on the matter, they had learned their lesson and admitted the truth of their earlier intentions, lamenting, 'Woe to us, we have transgressed greatly'. Then they repented sincerely and returned to God, saying, 'To our Lord we humbly turn'.

(LXVIII, 17-32)

God sometimes educates people through affliction. He may also give them His bounty as a test. A true believer is he who does not rejoice in good times except as a means to lead him to please his Lord. He does not despair in affliction either, because patience pleases God. Whether it comes or goes, we should raise our souls above being worshippers of wealth, freeing them from slavery to gold and silver by paying God's due (zakāh) and spending our wealth in His way.

Abū Wāqid al-Laithī said:

'When the Prophet received a new revelation we would go to him to

learn it from him. One day I came to him and he said, 'God, glory be to Him, says:

> "We sent down wealth in order that prayer might be maintained and the zakāh paid. And if the son of Adam had one valley of gold he would like to have a second, and if he was given the second he would wish to have a third: nothing would fill his belly except dust, and God accepts those who return to Him."[40]

The Prophet said:

> 'There are two qualities that God loves and two that he detests. The ones He loves are those of good moral character and a generous nature, while the ones He detests are those of bad moral character and a miserly nature. When God wishes good for a man he engages him in the task of fulfilling the needs of other people'.

In the above story of the garden, what is in conflict with faith is the miserliness which seized the hearts of the owners of that garden before they repented, yet even so the affliction that fell upon them possessed an advantage, since it rendered their hearts inhabitable by faith.

Let us take another example of an unbeliever, as seen in the story of Korah, told in the Qur'ān. Korah was one of Moses' people. He grew up in Egypt and God bestowed on him almost countless wealth and provided for him all the means of a happy life. In addition to his extensive riches he had a strong body, and radiant face (so much so that he used to be referred to as "the radiant one"; he was eloquent in tongue, charming in speech and endowed by God with many other favours.

It would seem logical that he should thank his Lord for all the grace shown to him and use these talents and favours in a way that manifested gratitude - but he wanted something more. He looked about his surroundings and amongst his kinsfolk and found nothing there to raise him to the status of a ruler or to give him authority, so he isolated himself from his own people and began to draw closer to the Pharaoh, flattering him and his vanity, until he became one of his companions. So in addition to his wealth he gained the might and authority of a companion to the Pharaoh.

40 A holy utterance.

He was enchanted by this false glory, becoming more and more arrogant, firmly believing that happiness consisted in wealth and fame in the company of the Pharaoh. Life continued in this way, and he believed that it would last for ever.

One day he was sitting with the Pharaoh and Hāmān, when Moses entered, calling on them to follow the mission with which God had charged him:

> *We sent forth Moses with Our signs and with clear authority to the Pharaoh, Hāmān and Korah, but they said, 'This is a sorcerer and a great liar'.*
> *(XXVIII, 23–24)*

Korah disregarded the claims of truth and kinship and went along with the Pharaoh, in order to preserve his own wealth and authority, and denounced Moses, too. He also went along with the Pharaoh in his aggressive tyranny, saying, 'Put to death the sons of those who believe with him and spare their women', and when the Pharaoh said, 'Let me kill Moses', Korah did not attempt to defend the Messenger of God. Instead this was done by a believing person whose story we will recount later.

Some righteous people, having seen how wealth and authority had corrupted Korah, discussed the matter and agreed to try and reason with him. They met him and spoke as gently as they could, summing up their advice in the following points, which may be held as the ideal for people of great wealth, and as the laws to which they should submit. They said to him:

> 'You boast because of your wealth. You are proud of it, joyful because you possess it. Wealth should only be a matter of rejoicing if it is a means to goodness. Do not rejoice vainly in having much, for God does not love such people. Seek to please God. Do not forget your share of this world, but seek God and store up for the day when neither wealth nor children will avail you, and when only a sound heart will count.
>
> Be generous to others as God has been generous to you. Pay the zakāh on your wealth by helping the needy, and on your strength by supporting the weak, and on your authority by assisting the person who is wronged to be rendered his due.
>
> Do not spread corruption on the earth, for God does not love the sowers of corruption.'

But Korah replied with challenging mockery, 'I have been given this much on account of the skill I possess, of my good management and my wisdom, and my plans and knowledge in commerce, which never go wrong'. Thus he denied any Grace or Divine favour. He forgot, in the intoxication of his wealth and enthusiasm in arguing, the true stories which show that God destroyed stronger people in authority than Korah, people who did not fear Him or pay His due for His favours, whether in wealth, power or authority.

Wishing to challenge and mock those who had come to give their advice, Korah went out in all his finery among the people, boastfully looking right and left in arrogance, with gold and silver on him. When this was observed by those who love this life and who live by their instincts, they were enchanted by his array and said, overwhelmed by their greedy lust for wealth, 'Would that we had the like of Korah's fortunes: he is indeed a man of mighty wealth. But those whom God guided to the right path replied in admonition, 'Woe to you! Better is the reward of God for him that has faith and does good works'.

The way of life ordained by God never fails to function and one of the laws which is relevant to our situation at present is:

> *When the earth has taken on its glitter and has decked herself out, and her inhabitants think they have power over her, Our command comes upon her by night or day, and We turn her to stubble, laying her waste, as if she had not flourished the day before.* *(X, 24)*

> *And when We desire to destroy a city, We send commandments to its people who live at ease, but who deviate from the way of God, and then Our Judgement will rightly be passed upon it and We shall utterly destroy it.* *(XVII, 16)*

Now if this is the law of God on earth and in cities, what is to be expected for Korah and the likes of him?

> *We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling, and there was none to protect him from God, nor was he able to save himself.* *(XXVIII, 82)*

When those who coveted his position before saw this, they said,

'Behold, God gives abundantly to whom He will and sparingly to whom He pleases. Had He not been gracious to us He would have caused the earth to swallow us as well. Behold, the unbelievers do not prosper'.

The lesson to be learned is summed up in the Qur'ān:

> *As for the Hereafter, We assign it to those who have no desire to exalt themselves in this world, nor to spread corruption. The blessed end is for the God-fearing.* *(XXVIII, 83)*

In contrast with the above examples of unbelievers, let us consider the behaviour of upright followers of God's law.

The wealth of Korah reminds us in contrast of the wealth of Muslims in the days of the Prophet. One such wealthy man was ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn ʿAuf, but he used to pay God's due in full. He even gave away to the poor people of Medina a complete caravan of five hundred camels with their loads of merchandise. Wealth, therefore, will only be a trial if God's due is not paid on it. In the same way children will be a trial if the father does not pay God's due, which is also the nation's due, in bringing them up well.

A sublime image of the believer appears in a story about the Prophet, which we regard as a shining beacon, and an ideal which we should regard with respect and reverence. Books of his biography and Aḥādīth inform us that some notable members of the Prophet's tribe of Quraysh went to his uncle, Abū Ṭālib, who protected the Prophet when he was preaching the new religion, and said to him:

> ' "You are one of our elders and have a high and eminent position among us, and we have asked you to put an end to your nephew's activities, but you have not done so. In God's Name, we cannot tolerate that our fathers should be reviled, our customs mocked and our gods insulted! Unless you rid us of him we will fight both of you until one side perishes". Then they departed, resolving to uphold their firm stand. Abū Ṭālib was deeply distressed at the breach with his people and their enmity, but he could not desert the Messenger of God or give him up to them. He reflected deeply, then he summoned his nephew, the Prophet, and told him what his people had said, adding, "Spare me and yourself. Do not place upon me a burden greater than I can bear".

'The Prophet thought that his uncle was going to abandon him, and that he would find it too difficult to protect him. He in his turn thought deeply for a moment about the future without the support of his uncle, when suddenly his confidence in God became greater, while his faith in His help was as firm as ever, and he said to his uncle, "O uncle, in the Name of God, if they were to put the sun in my right hand and the moon in my left, on condition that I abandon this course, I would not do so until God had made it victorious, or I had perished in its cause". Then he rose to go, with unshakeable confidence in God's help, but as he was departing his uncle called, "Come back, nephew - say what you please. In the Name of God, I will never betray you on any account".'

The moral courage of believers manifests itself in its true colours only in the face of strong opposition. This story is not an isolated incident in the life of the Prophet: it is an instance that reveals a permanent quality in his character.

"ʿUtbah ibn Rabīʿah, who was a chief, said one day when he was sitting in the Qurayshi assembly, and the Messenger of God was alone in the mosque, "Why should I not go to Muḥammad and make some proposals to him? He might accept some of them, and then we will give him whatever he wants and he will leave us in peace". This happened when Ḥamzah, the Prophet's uncle, had accepted Islām and they saw that the Prophet's followers were increasing and multiplying, so the Quraysh agreed with ʿUtbah and he went and sat by the Prophet and said, "My nephew, as you know, you are one of the noblest of us, and you hold a worthy position of great ancestry. You have come to your people with a serious matter, dividing the community thereby, mocking their customs and insulting their gods and their religion, declaring that their forefathers were unbelievers. Listen now to me and I will make some offers to you and perhaps you will be able to accept some of them".

The Prophet said, "Speak, and I will listen to you". ʿUtbah said, "If what you want is money, we will gather it for you from our property so that you may be the richest of us; if you want sovereignty we will make you king over us; and if this spirit which haunts you is such that you cannot get rid of it, we will find a physician for you and spend as much money as is needed in finding a cure - for often a spirit takes possession of a man until it can be expelled". When ʿUtbah had finished the

Prophet said, after carefully listening to him, "Have you finished? Now listen to me:

> *In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate: Hā, Mīm*[41]*: A Revelation sent down from the Merciful, the Compassionate; a Book whose verses are well expounded; an Arabic Qur'ān for men who know. It is good news and yet also a warning, for most of them have turned away and do not give ear. They say, 'Our hearts are veiled from what you call us to . . .'* "
>
> *(XXI, 1-27)*

ʿUtbah, putting his hands behind his back and leaning back as he listened attentively, was over-awed as the Prophet went on reciting, until he reached the end of verse 27, a point at which prostration is recommended. At once he prostrated himself to God. When he sat up he said, 'You have heard what you have heard: the rest remains with you'.

'When ʿUtbah returned to his companions they noticed that his expression had completely altered and they asked him the reason. He said that he had heard words such as he had never heard before, which were "neither poetry, spells nor soothsaying". He continued, "Take my advice and do as I do. Leave this man entirely alone, for in God's Name the words which I have heard will spread very far and there will be a story to recount about them. If other Arabs kill him, they will have rid you of him – and if he gets the better of the Arabs, his sovereignty will be your sovereignty, his power will be your power and you will be most prosperous through him". They said, "He has bewitched you with his tongue". ʿUtbah replied, "You have my opinion – you must do what you think fit".'

Here again, the Prophet was not swayed in the least by the temptation for wealth or power, however great, from the course he knew he should take.

The Companions of the Prophet, too, set a very good example as believers:

'The Prophet went out with the army to bar the way of a trade caravan belonging to the Quraysh, in retribution for their having unjustly appropriated the property of Muslims in Mecca, when news came that the Quraysh had come out to protect their caravans. The Prophet told his Companions of this and asked their advice. Abū Bakr

41 The Arabic letters for 'ḥ' and 'm'.

spoke well, and so did ʿUmar: then al-Miqdād ibn ʿAmr rose and said, "O Messenger of God, go where God has directed you, for we are with you. We will not say to you as the Children of Israel said to Moses – "Go you and your Lord and fight, and we will stay behind here", but rather, "Go you and your Lord and fight, and we will fight with you. By Him Who sent you with the truth, if you were to take us to Bark al-Ghimād we would struggle resolutely until you reached it".

'The Prophet spoke gratefully to him and prayed for him. Up to that point he had not heard anything from his Helpers from Medina, the Anṣār, for none of them had spoken yet. So he said, "Give me advice, you men", meaning them. This is because when they had paid allegiance to him at al-ʿAqabah before the emigration they had said, "We are not responsible for you until you enter our territory, and then we will protect you as we would our wives and children". The Prophet was therefore afraid that the Anṣār might consider that they were only responsible for assisting him against an attack on Medina itself, but that it was not incumbent upon them to go with him against an enemy outside their own territory. So when he asked for their advice, Saʿd ibn Muʿāth stood up and said the following words, which should be considered as the ideal principles for a relationship between a sincere army and its faithful leader.

"You seem to mean us, Messenger of God". The Prophet replied, "Yes", so Saʿd continued, "We have believed in you and have accepted what you say as the truth, for we have offered you our allegiance and word, we listen to you and obey. So go where you wish, for we are with you. And in the Name of God, if you were to take us to this sea and plunge into it to cross it, we would plunge into it with you. Not a man, not a single man, would stay behind. We do not fear the idea of your taking us to meet our enemies tomorrow. We are steadfast in fighting, trustworthy in combat, and God may display to you qualities in us which will please you. So go forth with us in the blessing of God". The Prophet was pleased at Saʿd's words and encouraged by them, so he said, "Go forward and rejoice, for God has promised me one of the two parties.[42] By God, it is as though I now see the enemy in the places where they will be slain". And, by the blessing of God, they went forward and gained victory by His help.'

There is a further image of the believers which the Qur'ān has expounded on more than one occasion, making it a brilliant

42 Meaning either the caravan or the army of the Quraysh.

example for the Muslims, a true lesson for them and an encouragement, and that is the story of the Egyptian sorcerers who were brought by the Pharaoh to overcome Moses. But when they perceived the truth they declared in front of the Pharaoh and all his people, "We believe in the Lord of Aaron and Moses". The Pharaoh was infuriated and threatened them with the most dreadful torture, but they were not cowed:

> *They answered, 'We shall surely return to our Lord. You are taking vengeance on us only because we have believed in the signs of our Lord made manifest to us. Lord, pour down steadfastness upon us and make us die in submission to Thee'.* *(VII, 126)*

Let us return to the story of Korah and see how the believer who was involved acted. The Qur'ān tells us of a man amongst the Pharaoh's people who concealed his commitment to his faith in order to be more effective in helping his fellow-believers:

> *We sent Moses with our signs and a clear authority to the Pharaoh, Hāmān and Korah. But they said,* [He is] *a lying sorcerer'. When he brought them the true faith from Us they said, 'Put to death the sons of those who believe with him and spare their women', but the schemes of the unbelievers were bound to fail. Pharaoh said, 'Let me kill Moses and let him invoke his Lord. I fear that he will change your religion or spread disorder in the land'. Moses said, 'I take refuge in my Lord and your Lord from every arrogant man who does not believe in the Day of Judgement'. Then a believer among Pharaoh's people, who had kept his faith hidden, said, 'Would you kill a man merely because he says, "My Lord is God", although he has brought you clear signs from your Lord? If he is a liar, his lying is upon his own head, but if he be truthful* [at least] *a part of what he threatens you with will smite you. Surely God does not guide a transgressor or a liar. My good people, today the Kingdom is yours and you are masters in the land, but who will save us from the wrath of God when it descends upon us?' The Pharaoh said, 'I am only showing you what I think; I am only guiding you to the right path'. The believer said, 'My people, I fear for you a fate like that which befell the parties,*[43] *a fate like that of the people of Noah. ᶜĀd, Thamud, and those that came after them. God does not desire to wrong His servants. My people, I fear for you against the Day of Crying Out,*[44] *when you will turn, retreating, with*

43 'Parties' signifies the people who organized opposition to the Prophets.

44 'Crying out' signifies the calling out by name of people to the Judgement, and to those crying out in lamentation, as well as to the Blessed calling out in praise of their Lord.

no-one to protect you from God. Whomsoever God leads astray has no guide. Joseph brought you the clear signs before this day, yet you continue to doubt the value of what he brought, for when he died you said, "God will never send another Messenger after him". In such a way God will lead astray the doubting transgressors. Those who dispute concerning the signs of God without any authority coming to them are doing what is very hateful in the eyes of God and all believers. Thus God sets a seal on the heart of every arrogant tyrant'. The Pharaoh said, 'Hāmān, build me a tower, that I may reach the paths of heaven and look upon the God of Moses, because I think he is lying'. Thus the evil of Pharaoh's deeds seemed fair to him and he was turned away from the path of truth and his guile came only to ruin. He who believed said, 'Follow me, my people - I will guide you along the right path. The life of this world is but a fleeting enjoyment: truly the life to come is the everlasting home. Whoever does an evil deed shall be recompensed only with another, but whoever does a good deed, be they male or female, and have faith, they will be admitted to Paradise, where they will be provided for without reckoning. O my people, why do I call you to salvation and you call me to Hell-fire? You call me to disbelieve in God and to serve others with Him, of whom I know nothing, whereas I call you to the Almighty, the All-Forgiving. Indeed, what you call me to can neither be invoked in this world nor in the world to come. We shall all return to God and the transgressors will be the inheritors of Hell. You will truly remember what I say to you. I confide my cause to God. Indeed God watches over His servants!' So God protected him from the evil of what they plotted, and a dire punishment encompassed the Pharaoh's people.

(XI, 23-45)

Before coming to an end, let us also remember the example of believing and unbelieving women:

God has cited as an example of unbelievers the wife of Noah and the wife of Lot. They were married to two of Our upright worshippers; yet they deceived their husbands, who thus could not protect them from the decree of God. It was announced to them, 'Enter the fire, along with the rest who enter'. But as an example of believers God has cited the Pharaoh's wife, who said, 'Lord, build for me a house with Thee in Paradise and deliver me from the Pharaoh and his misdeeds; deliver me from the iniquitous people', and Mary, the daughter of Imran, who guarded her chastity, so We breathed Our Spirit into her womb and she accepted the words of her Lord, and his Books, and ranked among the obedient. *(LXVI, 10-12)*

The following verses give the essence of what this book, in its various chapters, has tried to convey about the Creed of Islam:

The Messenger believes in what has been revealed to him from his Lord, and so do the believers. They all believe in God, his Angels, his Books, and his Messengers: We make no difference between any of His Messengers. And they say, 'We hear and obey. Grant us Your forgiveness, Lord; to You is the [eventual] *return'. God does not charge a soul with more than it can bear: it will be rewarded for the good it has earned and be accountable for the evil it has done. Lord, do not hold it against us if we forget or make a mistake. Lord, do not lay on us such a burden as You did on those before us. Lord, do not charge us with more than we can bear. Pardon us, forgive us, and have Mercy upon us. You are our Protector. Help us against the unbelievers. (II, 285–286)*

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